BUILDING LOCAL DEMOCRACY:
THE EARLY YEARS OF THE GENERAL COUNCIL OF IRISH COUNTY COUNCILS, 1899–1910

TADGH QUILL-MANLEY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

OVERVIEW
2

INTRODUCTION
3

THE BEGINNING, 1899-1902
9

NAVIGATING POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE CHALLENGES, 1903-1906
46

MINUTE-TAKERS, HISTORY-MAKERS, 1907-1910
78

CONCLUSION
118

DÁN - I GCEANN NA COMHAIRLE
123

BUILDING LOCAL DEMOCRACY

OVERVIEW

At the dawn of the twentieth century, as Ireland's political future remained uncertain and contested, a quieter revolution was unfolding at the local level. '*Building Local Democracy*' uncovers the fascinating and largely forgotten story of the General Council of Irish County Councils. This was an ambitious experiment in self-governance and democratic collaboration, that emerged from the sweeping reforms of the 1898 Local Government Act.

Drawing from various General Council minutes, newspaper reports, and public records, this richly detailed history traces the Council's first decade as it grappled with public health, railway reform, education, industrial policy, and the thorny question of its own purpose. Was it a mere co-ordinating forum—or the embryo of a form of Home Rule? Could it rise above various awkward, perhaps inevitable divides, to serve a broader civic mission?

With key figures such as Sir Thomas Grattan Esmonde, P.J O'Neill, and John Sweetman at its helm, the Council navigated the hopes, tensions, and limitations of a newly democratised political landscape. This project captures not only the General Council's procedural milestones, but also the larger aspirations it had represented: fairness, competence, co-operation, and a vision of self-governance and democratic input at a regional level.

Although a hobby project by a college student, it is part local history, and also part political insight. '*Building Local Democracy*' offers a compelling account of a pivotal institution at a critical moment in Ireland's journey toward building democratic institutions. It is a timely reminder of the enduring importance of local voices in shaping broader change.

BUILDING LOCAL DEMOCRACY

INTRODUCTION

At the threshold of the twentieth century, a quiet but determined revolution was unfolding across the towns, villages, and counties of Ireland—not a revolution of arms, nor even of protest, but one of deliberation, co-operation, and the measured assertion of local voices in public affairs. The establishment of the General Council of Irish County Councils in 1899 marked a seminal moment in the development of Irish civic life, and this volume seeks to recover the complexity, urgency, and optimism that characterised its early years. In essence, this was a period in which Ireland's constitutional future remained fiercely contested, and yet amidst that contest, a practical experiment in democratic governance was being undertaken. Through the Local Government (Ireland) Act of 1898, the machinery of local administration—long the preserve of a privileged elite—was democratised, and with that came both opportunity and risk. The creation of County Councils and their subsequent decision to unite under a General Council signalled more than just a bureaucratic reorganisation. It was, in its own way, a statement of collective intent: a belief that Irishmen, regardless of creed or class, might govern local affairs with intelligence, fairness, and a shared sense of the common good.

However, forging a meaningful institution out of this new landscape was neither straightforward nor uncontested. From its very inception, the General Council had to contend with ambiguities both legal and ideological. Was it merely a co-ordinating forum with advisory capacity, or the embryonic scaffold of a future national administration? Could it rise above the entrenched sectarianism and political divisions that so often defined Irish public life, or would it, like so many initiatives before it, be submerged by partisan conflict? What would it mean, in practical terms, for representatives from Donegal and Waterford, Antrim and Kerry, to gather in one room and speak in the name of a shared purpose?

The answers to these questions were not settled in theory but thrashed out in practice—sometimes with civility and

consensus, sometimes with rancour and recrimination. This work charts those early encounters: the resolutions debated, the reports drafted, the deputations received, and the policies proposed. From disagreements over railway tariffs and public health regulations to efforts at industrial reform and education provision, the Council's minutes reveal not only the administrative minutiae of local governance, but also the growing confidence of a body beginning to sense its own legitimacy.

A particularly striking feature of the General Council in its formative phase is the tension it embodied between the pragmatic and the aspirational. On the one hand, it was concerned with the nuts and bolts of public service delivery: the maintenance of roads, the fairness of rates, the provision of schools and asylums. On the other, it was animated by broader ideals—of equity, representation, and even national regeneration. The debates around the role of Irish industries, the treatment of pauper lunatics, or the mechanics of railway reform, for instance, were never simply technical matters. They reflected deeper anxieties about self-reliance, justice, and what kind of Ireland was being built at the ground level.

Central to these efforts were men like Sir Thomas Grattan Esmonde and P.J O'Neill, whose names recur frequently in the proceedings. Esmonde, with his instinct for consensus and long-standing nationalist credentials, presided over the Council with a combination of idealism and practicality. Sweetman, the diligent honorary secretary, brought structure and continuity to its operations. Their leadership, however, was not unchallenged, and the minutes are peppered with evidence of competing visions. A handful of individuals had viewed the General Council as an indulgence—an ineffectual talking shop. Others, more radical, saw in it the embryo of a future Irish Parliament.

That the Council managed to sustain itself through its early trials—surviving the indifference of some councils, the scepticism of others, and the occasional outright hostility from government departments—speaks to the persistence of those who believed in the idea of local self-governance.

Moreover, despite its lack of statutory authority or secure funding, the General Council succeeded in carving out a space for influence. Its interventions on issues like the Fair Wages Resolution, the Equivalent Grant for technical education, and the conduct of the Local Government Board were taken seriously by both public and press. Indeed, as this collection makes clear, it was often in these specific, seemingly peripheral debates that the Council found its most effective voice.

One of the more revealing aspects of the Council's work is its relationship with the British administration in Dublin Castle. While officially outside the apparatus of direct power, the General Council nonetheless emerged as an interlocutor —sometimes cooperative, sometimes even combative. Its various submissions to the Chief Secretary, its participation in Viceregal Commissions, and its lobbying efforts in Parliament were not those of a passive or ornamental body. Rather, they suggest a developing institutional self-awareness: the conviction that it might, over time, evolve from a forum for mutual consultation into a recognised actor in national policy formation.

At the same time, the Council's story is also one of limits. The recurring frustration over the Local Government Board's unilateral decisions—particularly on the matter of official salaries—illustrates the structural constraints under which Irish local government operated. Despite the veneer of devolution, ultimate authority remained in London, and this asymmetry was a constant source of resentment. Yet even within those limits, the General Council served as a proving ground for democratic habits: for negotiation, coalition-building, and the articulation of local priorities in a national idiom.

It is worth noting, too, the social context in which all this occurred. Ireland at the turn of the century was undergoing profound transformation. The land question was still unresolved, urban poverty remained acute, and emigration continued to drain the country of talent and youth. Against that backdrop, the idea of a national assembly of County

Councils—meeting in Leinster Hall or the Antient Concert Rooms—might have seemed an unlikely lever for progress. And yet, as the documents presented in this volume attest, it was precisely through these modest structures that real, if incremental, change was pursued.

There is also a sense, looking back, that the General Council's very existence hinted at the shape of things to come. The repeated calls for statutory recognition, the insistence on greater fiscal autonomy, the push for better infrastructure and technical instruction—all foreshadowed the broader debates that would dominate Irish political life in the decades ahead. In that respect, the General Council was not only a product of its time but also a harbinger of a future in which local and national aspirations would become increasingly entwined.

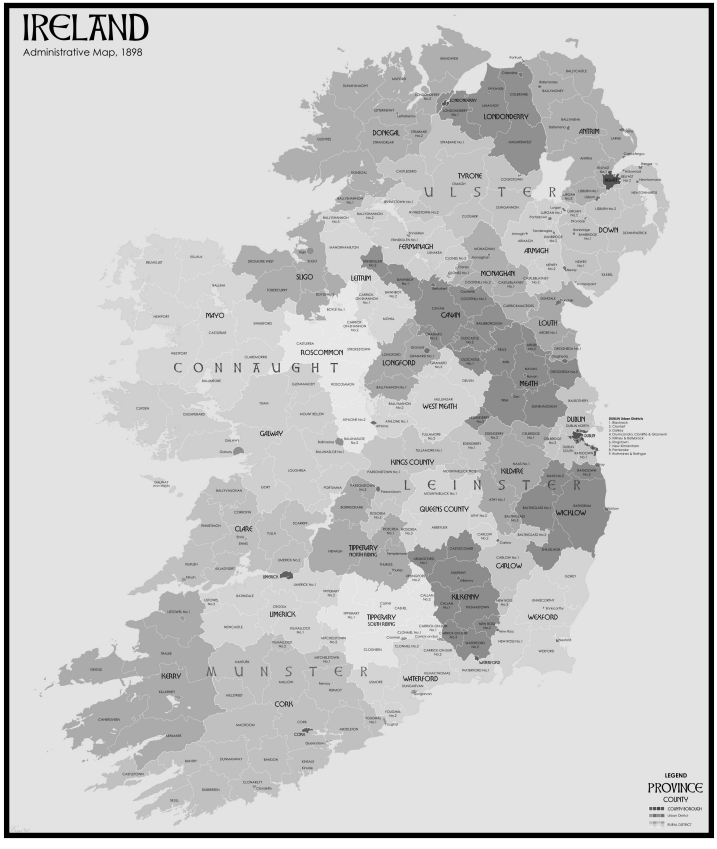
This introduction does not aim to draw firm conclusions, nor to impose a definitive interpretation on what remains a richly layered historical episode. Rather, it offers an invitation to the reader: to engage with the voices and concerns of those who, more than a century ago, sought to construct a more responsive and inclusive model of governance in Ireland. Their efforts, recorded here with clarity and care, deserve not only our attention but our respect.

In assembling this volume, we hope to shed light through '*Building Local Democracy: The Early Years of the General Council of Irish County Councils, 1899–1910*,' not merely on a forgotten chapter in administrative history, but on the broader, enduring question of what it means to share power, to build trust, and to govern well—lessons that remain as vital now as they were then.

While every effort has been made to present an accurate and faithful account of the early years of the General Council of Irish County Councils, it is important to acknowledge the limitations inherent in working with historical records of this kind. Many of the original sources are incomplete, damaged, or lacking in contextual detail. Some are smudged or ambiguously worded; others omit key information or reflect

the outlooks of the period. Inevitably, gaps had to be interpreted or left unresolved. This project was undertaken on a voluntary basis as part of a personal historical interest, and not as a formal academic commission. I am a college student with limited resources and access, and while I've done my best to approach the material with care, of course, the possibility of errors or oversights cannot be ruled. Sincere curiosity in learning and understanding history should not be the preserve of "gate-keepers." History ought to be encouraged as a hobby, and presented in a way that is accessible to the regular, plain person. I warmly welcome constructive feedback and corrections from readers, and I hope that any imperfections in the text do not detract from its value as a contribution to our shared understanding of Irish local governance.

Beyond its limitations, this work is intended as a stepping stone, rather than a final word. The history of the General Council of Irish County Councils—and indeed, the broader landscape of Irish local government at the turn of the twentieth century—remains under-explored and ripe for deeper research. By drawing together scattered accounts, minutes, and reports, I hope this project can prompt further discussion and inquiry. Whether by students, scholars, local historians, or anyone with an interest in Ireland's civic past, there is much more to uncover, interpret, and understand. If this modest contribution helps encourage renewed attention to the significance of this period and its institutions, then it will have served its purpose.



An administrative map of Ireland as set out by the Local Government (Ireland) Act 1898.

BUILDING LOCAL DEMOCRACY

THE BEGINNING, 1899-1902

In August 1899, at a meeting of Down County Council in the County Courthouse, Downpatrick, Mr Andrews delivered an extensive address concerning an invitation for the council to appoint delegates to serve on a new, national council of Irish county councils, the inaugural meeting of which was scheduled to take place in Dublin that month. He expressed support for the establishment of such a body in Ireland, akin to the one already functioning in England, which allowed for the exchange of views and experiences regarding the administration of local government affairs.

In offering his endorsement, Mr Andrews clarified that his longstanding political convictions—held firmly for fifteen years on a divisive national issue—remained unchanged. He declared that he would rather suffer personal loss than compromise those principles. However, he acknowledged that recent experience had demonstrated the value of cross-party collaboration. He cited the example of the Recess Committee, whose efforts had led to the creation of the Agriculture and Technical Instruction Act. That committee had brought together Irishmen of differing political beliefs who had worked harmoniously for the country's common good. As a member of the committee, he affirmed that not a single unpleasant exchange had occurred throughout its deliberations. He also referred to his involvement in another commission marked by similar goodwill. Mr Andrews stressed that genuine national progress could not be achieved until the divisions between North and South were softened, and he viewed this new initiative as a step towards helping the country move past the longstanding issues that had sown discord. While he did not personally seek a position on the new General Council—owing to his already demanding commitments—he felt it would be wrong to expect others to accept a responsibility he himself would be unwilling to undertake. Accordingly, he proposed that the chairman, the vice-chairman, and Colonel Ross of Bladensburg be appointed as Down County Council's delegates to the General Council. He further recommended that, should contentious political issues arise, the delegates should

register their protest and, if such topics were pursued, withdraw from the proceedings.

Mr McGrath reminded the council that the architect of the scheme was Sir Thomas Grattan Esmonde, a Nationalist Member of Parliament (MP), and chairman of Wexford County Council. In his view, there had been no need to raise references to Home Rule in the debate. He asserted that his fellow Nationalists, guided by common sense, independence, and firm convictions, were well capable of deliberating on social and economic matters constructively. Mr Magee was nominated by Mr McGrath and Mr O'Hare as one of the delegates; however, as the number of delegates was limited to three, Mr Andrews's proposal was ultimately adopted.[1]

Also in August, the '*Belfast Newsletter*' reported that the Conference of County Councillors, held at the Antient Concert Rooms in Dublin, completed its initial agenda in a more efficient and business-like manner than had generally been anticipated. The paper opined that if the proceedings continued in the spirit outlined by its founder, Sir Thomas Esmonde, M.P., during his inaugural address, it was expected to do no harm and might even achieve some positive outcomes. His speech was noted for its constructive tone. He explicitly ruled out the discussion of political matters where opinions were divided and identified a range of practical issues that the Conference could appropriately address. He urged delegates to set aside contentious topics, and instead focus on their shared opportunity to serve the country through cooperation and unity.

The publication believed that such an approach was regarded as sensible, particularly if the Conference were to accomplish any meaningful work. However, Sir Thomas's position was not universally supported among Nationalists. When the idea of the Irish National Council was first proposed, many Nationalists welcomed it in the belief that it could lay the groundwork for an eventual Irish Parliament. They viewed the Local Government Act as a stepping stone towards Home

[1] *Belfast Newsletter 23/8/1899*

Rule and expected that a body composed of elected County Councillors could emerge as a credible representative assembly, one that would eventually assert the right to self-government with increasing authority.

Others, however, believed the Council should restrict itself strictly to the administrative duties of local government. While Sir Thomas Esmonde's original intentions were widely perceived as political, his opening remarks at the Conference advocated a non-political approach. Should the Council follow that path, it could proceed without causing controversy. There were undoubtedly administrative issues on which councillors could profitably exchange views, even if the body had no legal power to enforce any decisions it might reach.

Despite these intentions, it was documented that there were early signs that the non-political character of the Council would not be preserved. On the very first day, delegates passed a resolution protesting an order issued by the Lord Lieutenant regarding the procedure for committing children to industrial schools. This was a matter outside the jurisdiction of County Councils, and one on which there was clear disagreement. The order had drawn criticism from Roman Catholics, who had benefitted from the former system. Under the previous arrangement, children whose families were unwilling or unable to care for them could be placed in industrial schools, often after being found begging in the streets. These institutions, typically under clerical control, provided for the children's welfare at the State's expense. The Lord Lieutenant's order, issued months earlier, sought to end this practice by discouraging contrived instances of street begging and reserving admission to industrial schools for genuinely destitute children. Early reports from the schools indicated the order was already having a positive effect. It implemented recommendations from Dr Fagan's most recent report on the subject and was widely considered a necessary reform. For that reason, the resolution opposing the order was deemed inappropriate for a body supposedly committed to steering clear of divisive issues.

The newspaper regarded this incident was seen as a likely sign of things to come. It was noted how the '*Freeman's Journal*' had expressed strong disapproval of Sir Thomas Esmonde's stance, arguing that it was neither possible nor desirable to exclude political questions from the Council's deliberations. The paper insisted that the Local Government Act should be used to advance the cause of Home Rule and claimed that the General Council ought to exert whatever influence it could in that direction. It reasoned that if County Councils had passed resolutions in favour of Home Rule and a Roman Catholic university, then a gathering of their delegates should be equally justified in doing so.

The '*Belfast Newsletter*' also described how the '*Freeman's Journal*' further argued that Sir Thomas Esmonde's distinction between national politics and the "common service" of Ireland was flawed. From a Nationalist perspective, political engagement was central to serving the country. According to the publication, no Irishman who was not a Nationalist could effectively contribute to national progress. The suggestion that Nationalists within the General Council should set aside their views to accommodate Unionist members was therefore seen as unrealistic and unwelcome.

In championing this position, the newspaper—closely aligned with Mr Dillon's party—adopted a narrowly partisan stance. It insisted that agitation for Home Rule must be pursued constantly, and that any initiative for social improvement should be supported only if it served to promote Nationalist sentiment. It was anticipated that, despite Sir Thomas Esmonde's efforts, the General Council would soon be compelled to follow this political course. Unionists were thus encouraged to make clear that they would not accept responsibility for any resolutions passed by the Council which strayed into the realm of partisan politics.[2]

[2] *Belfast Newsletter 24/8/1899*

At the September 1899 meeting of Londonderry Corporation, presided over by the Mayor, Alderman M'Learn, J.P., a recommendation was received from the Finance and General Purposes Committee suggesting that the Corporation send three delegates to the meetings of the General Council of County Councils in Dublin. Alderman Pollock objected to the proposal, expressing doubt over its practical value. He argued that the city Corporation was already well-acquainted with the city's needs and questioned what benefit, if any, would result from participating in conferences held in Dublin. He remarked that numerous similar assemblies—referred to as "Irish Parliaments"—had emerged over the past twenty years, yet none, in his view, had produced tangible results. He therefore proposed that the city Corporation refrain from spending time and resources on involvement in the council's proceedings. The Mayor clarified that no public funds would be used should the Corporation agree to send delegates. Each delegate would be required to cover his own expenses, as the Corporation lacked the authority to allocate public money for such a purpose.

Councillor Maxwell voiced support for the proposal, noting that the Local Government Act had only recently come into effect in Ireland. He explained that the conference had been convened to address issues relevant to all councils throughout the country, and it had been firmly established that political matters were not to be introduced at these meetings. The Mayor added that he saw no harm in the Corporation deciding to send delegates. While he did not place excessive emphasis on the exclusion of politics from the gatherings, he acknowledged its importance and felt the Corporation ought to respect that principle. He believed it was appropriate to send representatives and extend a gesture of courtesy to the assembly. Councillor F. H. Miller expressed strong agreement with the Mayor's remarks. He stated that the Corporation should set an example for other Northern councils by appointing three delegates. In doing so, they could also demonstrate a willingness to engage constructively—even with their political opponents—in discussions concerning the broader welfare of Ireland. Alderman Harper also endorsed the proposal. Following the

discussion, Alderman Pollock withdrew his objection, and the Mayor, along with Councillors Maxwell and Miller, were appointed as delegates.[3]

At a full meeting of Cork County Council in October 1899, a letter was read from the Irish County Councils' General Council. In the ensuing discussion, Mr Mahony expressed the view that no immediate action should be taken. Mr Ffrench, however, felt that the most recent deliberations of the General Council had received little public approval. He noted that many matters of public interest had been excluded from discussion, and, given those circumstances, he believed it would be best for the Council to refrain from engaging with the matter at present. In his view, the General Committee had conducted itself in a weak and indecisive manner.[4]

During January 1900, at an adjourned meeting of the Portadown Urban Council, a communication signed by Mr. W. T. French was read by Mr. C. Johnston, J.P., chairman of the council. The letter stated that, at a meeting of the General Council of Delegates of the Irish County Councils held in Dublin, a resolution was unanimously adopted concerning the unsatisfactory management and charges of the Irish railways. The resolution requested that a Commission be appointed by the Government to inquire into the whole question of railway and canal policy in Ireland, with special reference to reductions of rates and fares and the increase of facilities, giving due regard to the interests of the shareholders as well as of the public. The letter asked for the support of the council in the matter. Mr. J. Richardson remarked that this was a matter which should receive the careful attention of district councils. Experience had shown that the present system of examining private bills by committees in the House of Commons was far from satisfactory, and he thought they would be fully justified in supporting this organisation in their application for a Commission to inquire into the whole subject. He believed

[3] *Belfast Newsletter 22/9/1899*

[4] *Cork Examiner 20/10/1899*

the interests of the public would be much safer in the hands of a Commission than in those of a hybrid committee. He further expressed his conviction that they were within measurable distance of the time when a strong agitation should begin in favour of the Government buying up the Irish railways, which would undoubtedly be a great advantage to the country.

Mr. Livingston humorously responded, “this is just like the Home Rule agitation.” He added that it was simply a lot of agitators working for their own special interests. These appointments, he claimed, were given to barristers who were briefless, and useless at home. Mr. H. Richardson asked whether this organisation would be in a position to carry the matter through. He cautioned that a Royal Commission without a strong organisation to produce evidence would be a very useless thing. Mr. Acheson noted that when the Government bought up the telegraphs, they reduced tariffs and provided a better service. He pointed out that the railway company charged 10 shillings a ton on apples from Portadown to Belfast but only 3 shillings and 4 pence on flour, which was six times as valuable. Mr. J. Richardson added that the rate on everything was very high. He explained that if you were receiving two or three articles from the same house, the company made a speciality of dividing them under separate heads to run up the freight. Taking it all round, the tariff was nearly 10 shillings a ton. He then moved that they support the General Council of Delegates of Irish County Councils in this matter. Mr. Clow seconded the motion, which was passed.[5]

In March 1900, at a meeting of the Irish Board of Agriculture and Technical Education, chaired by the DATI’s vice-president, Sir Horace Plunkett MP, an important deputation advocated the desire for an official inquiry regarding the reform of agricultural instruction in Ireland. Among the public bodies represented were the General Council of the Irish County Councils (covering 20 councils), thirty Urban District Councils, and the city Corporations of Dublin,

[5] *Belfast Newsletter 24/1/1900*

Belfast, Limerick, and Londonderry. Various Harbour Boards, the Irish Agricultural Organisation Association, the Irish Co-operative Agency, Irish Co-operative Creameries, the Irish Dairy Association, the Irish Cattle Traders' Association, and the Irish Railway Reform Association were also involved. Several prominent figures, including Lord De Vesci, the Earl of Huntingdon, and MPs like Mr Carson and Mr Rontoul, sent apologies for their absence but expressed support for the deputation's aims.

Mr Molloy introduced the deputation, highlighting its broad and influential nature, and expressed regret over the Chief Secretary's absence due to illness, wishing him a speedy recovery. Mr W.T. French, the honorary secretary, read a memorial urging the Vice-President of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction to use his influence to secure the appointment of a Viceregal Commission. This commission would investigate the current state of railways, canals, and transit in Ireland, focusing on their impact on agriculture and industry, with the goal of improving the transport of produce. The memorial noted that cheap and efficient distribution is vital for the success of agriculture and industry, and Ireland had suffered from a lack of systematic organisation in this area. It referenced a previous Allport Commission from twelve years earlier, which had only briefly touched on railway transit and largely ignored canals. Since then, important changes affecting transit rates and facilities had occurred, making the old Commission's findings outdated. It was argued that public interest in economic and commercial issues had grown, making the present an ideal time for a thorough inquiry. The establishment of the new Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, with its statutory powers to address complaints before the Railway Commissioners, made it the appropriate body to oversee this investigation. The memorial emphasised that certain Irish Railway Bills pending in Parliament could restrict the Department's future authority over railway issues, so delaying these Bills to allow for a comprehensive inquiry was advisable. The deputation recommended a Viceregal Commission because previous inquiries initiated by the Lord Lieutenant had produced

practical reforms. They believed such a commission would be competent to deal with the complex transit issues facing Ireland and produce meaningful general reforms rather than simply approving or rejecting individual schemes.

Lord Monteagle supported the deputation, explaining that the new Department of Agriculture had the legal authority to facilitate the carriage and distribution of produce. The movement was politically neutral, representing traders, companies, and associations across Ireland regardless of party or class. While not opposed to the railway companies (many of which they were shareholders in), they believed the railway system required impartial investigation and reform due to widespread complaints. Mr Field, president of the Cattle Traders' Association and the Irish Railway Reform Association, emphasised the importance of the issue from both commercial and humanitarian perspectives. He pointed out the high freight rates and poor livestock transport conditions, noting that prosperity was impossible under the existing railway system. He expressed hope that the new Department of Agriculture would gain public confidence and improve the situation. Mr Wolff, MP, speaking for Belfast Corporation, expressed hope that the new Department would bring improvements to transit, which was currently among the worst. Belfast, as a major distribution and shipping centre, felt the impact keenly. He agreed with Mr Field that better railway facilities could reduce costs significantly, noting the disparity between Irish and American livestock transport rates. The deputation made no recommendation on specific solutions but insisted on the need for inquiry, trusting the Department would act with Ireland's welfare in mind.

Mr W. Johnston, MP, conveyed the Belfast Corporation's support, acknowledging Mr Plunkett's valuable work on the Recess Committee and expressing hope he would continue to help develop Ireland's resources. Finally, Count Moore of Londonderry expressed his agreement with Mr Field's views, noting that despite past disagreements over agricultural

legislation, the current consensus on the need for railway reform was strong.[6]

In April 1900, John Sweetman, honorary secretary, having taken up the question of inebriates' homes, reported that the Lord Lieutenant, in reply to a request of his, stated that the Executive Government could not undertake to make inquiries as to what institutions were prepared to undertake the care of habitual inebriates, or what public buildings not in use could be made available for their reception. The honorary secretary continued to say there was no Protestant institution willing to take on the work, though he was informed that a committee of ladies were endeavouring to establish one in Belfast. This, however, would be a private charity and would not be a certified asylum. There was no institution maintained by the Society of Friends for such a purpose. The superiors of the Catholic institutions at Belmont Park, Waterford, and of the House of Retreat, were also not prepared to undertake the work. The Superior of the Brothers of St. John of God, Stillorgan Park, however, was most anxious to take up the work of establishing an inebriates' home certified by the Lord Lieutenant under the Act. He had written to his superiors in France to obtain the necessary permission and would inform Mr. Sweetman of the result as soon as he received a reply. He thought there should be a good-sized farm on which to employ the patients. He had not yet received definite replies from all religious bodies but hoped shortly to be able to call the committee together, should they wish to continue their inquiries. The committee having charge of the question of the treatment of pauper lunatics and casuals recommended that the Chairman, Sir Thomas Esmonde, take the necessary steps to have clause 76 of the Local Government Act amended. The goal was to authorise the transfer of workhouse imbeciles and epileptics to auxiliary asylums in the same manner as harmless lunatics, to secure the assistance of the Treasury towards the erection of such auxiliary asylums, and to amend the law relating to the detention of casuals, the deportation of paupers, and the transfer of paupers in Ireland.

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[6] *Cork Examiner 21/3/1900*

Mr. John Sweetman read a report on the matters entrusted to him by the General Council. In reference to the resolution protesting against the action of the Local Government Board in overriding the decisions of councils concerning official salaries, Mr. Swaine, Secretary of the Local Government Board, replied that the General Council must be under a misapprehension. He stated that the Board had deferred dealing with applications from county officials for four months to allow councils to submit their views or come to an agreement with their officers, as provided for under Section 115 of the Act.

Replies had been received from managers of various Irish railway companies, expressing regret that their Boards were unable to comply with the Council's request to extend reduced fares to members attending council meetings. The Lord Lieutenant had also written, stating that it was not considered expedient to change the system by legislation. In concluding his report, Mr. Sweetman mentioned that since the last meeting, the County Councils of Fermanagh and Roscommon had appointed delegates, bringing the General Council's representation to 25 of the 33 County Councils, and four of the six Borough Councils. The following had not yet appointed representatives: Antrim, Cork, Galway, King's County, Leitrim, Mayo, Tyrone, and the Boroughs of Cork and Limerick. A delegate from Cavan stated that he knew of cases where the Local Government Board had fixed a salary without consulting the County Council, and at a higher figure than the officer had actually agreed to accept. A discussion followed, with the general view being that such matters should be left to the local bodies.

Mr. French (Tipperary) reported on the committee's recent deputation to Mr. Horace Plunkett, M.P., regarding Irish railways. They were now awaiting a reply from the Lord Lieutenant. He hoped for a favourable outcome and that a Commission would be appointed to thoroughly investigate the matter and provide relief from the high rates and lack of facilities that were widely acknowledged. He moved a resolution urging the Lord Lieutenant to appoint a Viceregal

Commission with as little delay as possible to inquire into and report on the current unsatisfactory condition of railway and canal communication in Ireland, and upon its injurious effects on the people and agricultural industries of the country. Mr. Convery seconded the motion.

Mr. Smith praised Mr. French for his excellent report and suggested that the Amalgamation Bill currently before Parliament should be deferred pending the proposed Commission's report. Mr. McGovern strongly supported the resolution. Mr. St. John Donovan suggested the deputation be sent without delay. Mr. Peacocke added that in County Wexford they were eager to have the railway to Rosslare completed, as it would prove highly beneficial. He feared, however, the project might not go forward if the amalgamation were sanctioned. The Chairman clarified that the resolution did not raise the issue of amalgamation, and was drafted with that intent. Mr. Donoghue warned that including the amalgamation issue could provoke a hostile deputation. Mr. Andrews, as someone interested in Irish railways, welcomed the inquiry. The resolution was adopted, and it was understood that the same deputation that had recently waited on Mr. Plunkett in London would also call on the Lord Lieutenant.

Mr. Smith called attention to the Local Government Board’s practice of granting salary increases to county officials without consulting the County Councils. He argued that a day should be appointed for discussion of such matters, allowing the Councils to present their views before any increases were granted. Mr. Conway claimed the Local Government Board seemed intent on making the Local Government Act a mockery and turning the people against local governance. Mr. McGovern insisted they must put a stop to the Board's high-handed actions. He asserted that County Councils, if they possessed any power at all, should exercise it.

He proposed the following resolution to the effect that their Council, which represented the vast majority of the County Councils of Ireland, protested against the arbitrary,

unconstitutional, and illegal conduct of the Local Government Board in increasing the salaries of county surveyors and other officials under the Local Government Act, without furnishing the Councils concerned with evidence or giving reasons on which it based its opinions. That, as the Local Government Board occupied the position and had all the powers of a Court of Appeal, they considered it had no right to increase the salary of any official behind the back of the Council interested, on the 'ex parte' statement of officials, as it had, in their view, almost invariably done, without first hearing the reasons of the Council concerned for refusing the increase requested by such officials. Mr. Smith seconded the resolution.

After further discussion, the resolution was passed and a deputation was appointed. A resolution regarding the rating provisions of the Act from the Clare County Council was also discussed and ultimately adopted. Mr. Hayes then moved that steps be taken to amend the Act in respect of the committees that would have charge of dispensaries. The motion was adopted, and the meeting adjourned.[7]

In August 1900, a meeting of the Irish County Council's General Council was held in the Leinster Lecture Hall, Molesworth Street, Dublin City. Sir Thomas Esmonde, Bart., presided, and among those present were: from Carlow – W. MacMurrough Kavanagh, J.P.; from Cavan – T. McGovern, J.P.; from Dublin – Thomas Brown, T.C., Joseph Mooney, J.P., and James Mahony; from Kerry – St John H. Donovan, J.P., and M.J. Nolan, J.P.; from Kildare – Samuel Morris, J.P.; from Meath – P.J. Kennedy, J.P., and John Sweetman; from Westmeath – Sir Walter Nugent, Bart.; and from Wexford – Sir Thomas H. Grattan Esmonde, Bart., M.P., and Michael Browne, J.P.

Mr. Nolan proposed the re-election of Sir Thomas Esmonde as chairman for the coming year, stating that Sir Thomas had devoted a great deal of time to the business of the Council and had done everything in his power to forward its

[7] *Belfast Newsletter 19/4/1900*

objectives and maintain unity among the members. He stressed the value of exchanging opinions between the representatives of various County Councils. Mr. McGovern seconded the motion, which was unanimously adopted. In reply, Sir Thomas Esmonde thanked the members for their support and expressed his appreciation for the assistance he had received from the Council, as well as from the honorary secretary and treasurer. On the motion of Mr. St John Donovan, seconded by Mr. Kennedy, Mr. John Sweetman was re-elected honorary secretary.

A letter was read from Mr. L. Dowdall, stating that the Chief Secretary did not see any useful purpose in receiving a deputation from the General Council on the subject of salary increases for officials by the Local Government Board, nor on the issue of qualifications for deputy surveyors. During the ensuing discussion, a member noted that a legal test case was being pursued in Fermanagh. Mr. Mooney remarked that, before resorting to legal action, a good case should be carefully selected. He believed that under the Act, officials were entitled to some increase in pay, especially given the increased responsibilities of surveyors and their assistants. If a County Council declined to grant additional remuneration, it would be difficult to challenge the Local Government Board's legal authority in raising salaries. However, if a Council offered a fair and reasonable salary and the Board further increased it without consulting the Council, that could be a suitable case to contest in court. Unless the Board exceeded its statutory powers, he felt it would be unwise to take legal action.

Mr. Brown reported that in Wexford, they had concluded the duties of County Surveyors had not increased and had taken the case to court, confident that they could prove there were no extra duties imposed. He expressed disappointment that more Councils hadn't taken a stand. Mr. Kennedy stated that County Councils had little legal ground to challenge the surveyors. The Local Government Board, he asserted, had the power to raise salaries in proportion to increased duties, though he believed the increases granted were excessive. In Meath, they had persuaded surveyors to sign agreements that

bound them to broad responsibilities, resulting in an annual saving of £200. He also questioned the legality of many deputy surveyor appointments, claiming they were made without proper examination. In such cases, the Councils might have leverage by refusing to recognise them and employing them as overseers instead, with the option of eventual dismissal. Mr. McGovern expressed surprise at Mr. Kennedy's dismissive attitude toward what he considered a serious legal question. He acknowledged increased duties for assistant surveyors but argued that salary increases had far exceeded these duties. He felt it improper to ask officials to make concessions out of goodwill and insisted that the courts should determine whether the Local Government Board could raise salaries without County Council consent.

The Chairman advised that the matter could not be properly discussed while it was sub judice. He reiterated Wexford's position: they were willing to pay appropriate salaries, but would not be overruled by external bodies. If the law proved to be against them, they could consider their next steps. He also commented on the qualifications of surveyors, noting that better-qualified men could not be hired for less than the current salaries and that the matter deserved reconsideration.
A committee comprising Sir Thomas Esmonde, W. MacMurrough Kavanagh, St. John Donovan, John Hammond, and P.J. Kennedy was appointed to examine possible alterations to the procedure of Council Orders, in view of new legislation empowering the Local Government Board to modify those Orders, either generally or for individual counties.

The honorary secretary then presented a report on the Committee for Inebriate Homes. At the last General Council meeting, it had been reported that the honorary secretary was in communication with Prior Sur of the House of St John of God in Stillorgan regarding the possible establishment of an inebriate home under the Inebriates Act of 1898. Prior Sur had since informed him that his superiors in France, having considered the matter, had decided against founding such an institution due to objections to the regulations, which made the home resemble a prison too closely. A letter was also

received from the Chief Secretary's Office at Dublin Castle, dated 2 July 1900, stating that no County or Borough Councils in Ireland had yet established a certified inebriate reformatory under Section 3 of the Act. Therefore, the relevant provisions of the law remained inoperative. In contrast, in England, several people had been convicted on indictment and were currently detained or under licence. If a reformatory were established in Ireland, magistrates would then be able to commit persons directly to it upon their consent to be dealt with summarily.

The officer in charge of the State Inebriate Reformatory at the Mullingar Asylum had reported receiving enquiries from across Ireland about accepting habitual drunkards. However, he had to explain that the state institution only accepted committals under Section 1 of the Act. The honorary secretary subsequently met with Prior Sur, who explained that the French superiors were mainly concerned with the overly punitive character of the regulations. The honorary secretary wrote to the Provincial of the Order in France, pointing out that the "Model Regulations" were open to modifications suited to particular institutions. On 8 July that year, the honorary secretary had received a response from Prior Sur, who had been informed by the Provincial that, at present, the Order could not undertake such work due to a shortage of Brothers to run the facility. As a result, the committee directed its chairman and honorary secretary to write to the Catholic Bishops assembled at Maynooth, asking for their advice and assistance. They also informed the bishops that the General Council would be prepared to recommend that County Councils cooperate to establish a certified inebriate reformatory for men, provided a religious order could be found to manage it. On the motion of Mr. Mooney, seconded by Mr. McGovern, the report was adopted. A vote of thanks to the Chairman brought the meeting to a close.[8]

In February 1901, a meeting of the Cork Corporation was held on in the afternoon inside the City Council Chamber, to

[8] *Cork Examiner 31/8/1900*

deal with a number of matters, among others, being the consideration of correspondence, including a letter dated 8th February from the Honorary Secretary of the Irish County Council. The letter stated that the next meeting of the General Council was scheduled to take place in Dublin on 12th April, and it asked whether the city Corporation wished to submit any questions for inclusion on the agenda paper, and whether they intended to nominate three delegates.[9]

In April 1901, a general meeting of the Irish County Councils' General Council was held at the Central Lecture Hall, Westmoreland Street, Dublin. Sir Thomas Esmonde, M.P., presided. The Secretary (Mr Sweetman) read a letter addressed to the chairman in October last by Mr Joseph Dollard, Wellington Quay, offering, in acknowledgment of the confidence in his productions, especially since the passing of the Local Government Act, to do gratuitously whatever printing the general council might require, including the printing of any annual report or other publications the council might desire. The Chairman replied at the time accepting the offer, pending the meeting of the general council. Sir Thomas Esmonde then moved a vote of thanks to Messrs Dollard for their kind and generous proposal. The least they could do in recognition of their extremely generous act was to pass it, and he proposed that the best thanks of the Irish County Councils would be and tendered to Mr Dollard for his generous action in connection with the printing of the council. Viscount Cony seconded the resolution, which was passed unanimously.

Mr Sweetman read the following resolution, which had been forwarded by the Meath County Council to the effect that they would ask the Irish County Councils' General Council to discuss at their next meeting what actions county councils, district councils, and Boards of Guardians could have taken to support and encourage Irish industries. He said, in the course of his speech, that he would propose for the purpose of starting a discussion the following resolution, outlining that because people should, in his opinion, always work to

[9] *Cork Examiner 19/2/1901*

grow their country's industries, and because Irish industries had suffered from a lack of support by both individuals and public bodies, which had caused many people to emigrate and had increased the burden on public funds, the council would declare that Irish manufacturers deserved strong and practical support from the Irish people. Furthermore, public institutions should specify in their advertisements for supplies that preference would be given to Irish-made products, as long as they met acceptable quality and price standards, and all bids should state whether the goods were made in Ireland. Copies of this resolution were suggested to be sent to all local councils, public bodies, church leaders, and heads of institutions, encouraging them to adopt similar measures to promote Irish industry.

The object of the resolution, he thought, was one on which they could all agree, although they disagreed largely on other political questions. He did not see why they, the representatives of the people of Ireland, should not all work for the material advancement of their native country. In one sense, he thought they were all Irish Nationalists; they desired to see Irishmen prosperous and self-reliant. If they wanted to see Ireland populated by free persons and not by slaves, if they had a Home Government, one of its first efforts should be to encourage Irish industry, endeavouring to keep the food Ireland produced to feed an Irish population. In his opinion, the public bodies of Ireland could do something in this direction, and he thought it was time for them to do something, and not content themselves with always throwing the blame on the English Parliament when it was evident they did not themselves do what they had the power to do. If the public bodies of Ireland took up this matter, private bodies supported by public subscriptions would not be slow in following the example. The county councils should not be considered merely as institutions for making roads and bridges, but they should have together the best men of the different counties of Ireland for the common good. Representing the county councils of the whole of Ireland, they should be able to give the Irish people the lead in all things that affected its material prosperity. To his mind, it was evident that if Irish farmers were to export all their

produce except what they ate themselves to foreign countries to support manufacturers who would supply these Irish farmers with everything they used, Ireland would not be as well populated nor as prosperous as if the farmers exchanged their surplus produce with manufacturers living in Ireland for all the goods these farmers required. Ireland, he claimed, could feed its prevailing population many times over, and it could clothe itself and supply itself with most of the things it required, if Ireland only willed it.

He had received a pamphlet from the Shop Assistants' Irish Industrial League, being "An Appeal for the Co-operation of the Irish People." He was astonished to see the following list of patrons: Archbishop Croke, Lord Monteagle, John E. Redmond, M.P.; Sir Thomas Pile, Right Honourable Horace Plunkett, Samuel Smiles, J.P.; Most Rev. Dr Sheehan, the Bishop of Waterford, William Field, M.P.; Rev. T.A. Finlay, S.J.; Sir Daniel Hearty, J.P.; Nannetti, M.P.; and Douglas Hyde, LL.D.

He claimed that in this grouping, they had men of all politics uniquely united. The first object of this society was to encourage and help to develop the industrial resources of Ireland; the second, being to promote the sale, wear, and use of Irish-made articles generally. He outlined how they felt that that meeting, as representative men, could do much in support of that movement. Mr Joseph Mooney, in seconding the resolution, said he considered it admirable, and he did not think any amount of discussion would enable them to provide a better one. He thought many private individuals and a good many public bodies had been hammering away at the subject for a long time, and he knew, speaking for some bodies he was connected with, that for a long time the recommendations made in the resolution had been as far as possible practically carried out. It might have been that, in some places, sufficient attention had not been directed to procuring Irish goods, and he was sure the resolution would have a very salutary effect on some bodies in the country. He remarked that he was a member of the South Dublin Union Board for many years, and it was a long time since they made any attempt to get Irish-made flour, and they rather

failed. At first, they used to get American flour, and now they had a special clause in their advertisements and tenders to the effect that at all events the flour must be ground in Ireland. They found there was difficulty in carrying it further. The clothing used by the inmates is to a great extent Irish-made, and in many cases not only is the clothing made in the Union, but the materials are made by pauper labour. That might not perhaps encourage Irish manufacture outside, but the Guardians thought the paupers should be made to work while in the house. Stockings, mats, and brushes are all made on the premises. He believed that a resolution of that kind must do a great deal. In public institutions, it might be found that many cotton materials could be replaced by Irish linen. Of course, he opined, the quality of the material should be taken into account, and public bodies not be justified in giving somewhat higher prices for Irish goods, on the grounds that they would wear and last longer.

Mr Peacocke supported the resolution. He felt confident that the fact that a number of urban districts had taken up the Technical Education Act must have had a great effect on the country, and he felt certain if representatives like those composing the County Councils' General Council took the onus of pushing the question of technical education, it must be of great advantage. In Wexford, he outlined that the urban district council had taken the matter up actively, and they were amazed lately in the county town to find that out of a population of 13,000 or 14,000, they had upwards of 800 engaged in industrial works. Mr S. Morris supported the resolution.

Mr D.J. Cogan, M.P., disagreed with Mr Sweetman about not blaming the English Parliament for the decay of Irish industries. To his mind, it was entirely to blame, and anybody who studied the commercial history of the country before and since the passing of the Union would agree that the English Parliament was the main cause of the decline of the commercial industry of this country. However, he claimed, they should all have been grateful to Mr Sweetman for bringing the matter forward. He thought if all the Irish people, down the aristocracy, took a leaf out of the book of

the Volunteer Movement of 1782, and wore Irish goods, it would be a great advantage to Irish industries. He considered the movement in favour of technical education would give a great impetus to Irish manufacture. Their people were not to blame in the past for failing to keep pace to any extent in the markets of the world because they were not properly equipped and educated. Mr Smith also supported the resolution. He thought the Technical Instruction Board should do more to promote rural industries, and with the permission of the council, he would move a resolution on the subject. Mr Donoghue suggested that Irish manufacturers might be enabled to establish a central depot in Dublin where people might obtain information as to the origin and nature of Irish manufactures.

Mr H. de J. Montgomery, though he did not agree with a great deal that had been said on economics by some of the speakers, joined in supporting the resolution. He had no doubt, in his view, that the general doctrine laid down in the lecture referred to was perfunctory only. The general prosperity and wealth of nations were not, in the long run, furthered by protection direct or indirect. The political economists of the district schools, however, admitted that it was perfectly legitimate in the case of new countries or developing countries that were behind in the race with their industries to establish certain bounties to promote industries. In the case of Irish industries, he suggested that it would be argued that the British Government were not altogether to blame for the decline, which was contributed to partly by the unwise system of bonuses adopted by the Irish Parliament. He was not prepared to go into that question at that time. There was no harm whatsoever in asking the county and district councils to help Irish industries, if it was not imagined that the industries of the country could not eventually maintain themselves.

The Chairman, in putting the resolution, said this question of the encouragement of Irish industries was by no means a new question. Latterly, there had been increased interest taken in it, but there always had been many individuals and public bodies working in this direction. The South Dublin Union, as

Mr Mooney had shown, had given practical example, and on Gorey District and Wexford County Council, they had also helped to forward Irish industry. There was one important point that they should not overlook, no matter how anxious they were to stimulate Irish manufacture. The fundamental principle should be that the articles should be equally as good and equally as cheap as the articles they could get elsewhere. He (the chairman) was prepared to go a little further himself to support home industry, but the principle of honesty and fair dealing must be observed. The resolution was then carried unanimously.[10]

In July 1901, at a meeting of Londonderry County Council, Mr O'Neill proposed that the Finance Committee be instructed to recommend an annual payment of £3 sterling from the county funds by the Londonderry County Council to help cover the incidental and necessary costs associated with the work of the General Council of Irish County Councils. Up to that point, he noted, the funding had been provided by a few well-known individuals, but, as everyone must have recognised, the Council had already achieved a great deal of good. Therefore, its costs ought to have been shared by the various county councils across the country. Colonel Clark supported the motion. Sir Thomas Lecky asked whether there was any risk that the auditor might surcharge the amount. Mr O'Neill responded that such a surcharge was indeed possible, but it would have been unusual, given that similar expenses had been permitted in England and Scotland. If a surcharge did occur, the issue could have been raised in the House of Commons. Mr Convery, referring to the risk of politics being introduced into the General Council, warned that if this happened, the Council would not last long. Up to that point, it had proven to be of value, and the contribution requested was only a nominal amount. When put to a vote, the resolution was passed by a large majority.[11]

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[10] *Belfast Newsletter 13/4/1901*

[11] *Belfast Newsletter 22/7/1901*

It was reported by the '*Irish Daily Independent*' that a meeting of the Irish County Councils' General Council had been held at 35 Molesworth Street, Dublin in August 1901. There had been a significant amount of business to address. The first order of business had been the election of the chairman and honorary secretary for the coming year. Afterwards, the reports of the past year had been submitted, and the ongoing conflict between the Wexford and Wicklow County Councils and the Local Government Board had then been discussed. A deputation had also been received from the Irish Trades Union Congress in relation to the fair wages resolution. Several other important matters had also been considered, including the quarterly inspection of roads, encouragement of Irish industries and Irish railways, the suffocation of Irish interests, qualifications of deputy surveyors, expenses in administering weights and measures, overdrawn accounts of County Councils, and fees and duties on clerical charges. The following notices of motion had also been discussed:

Mr. John Butler, J.P., Kilkenny County Council, had proposed that the disability affecting landlords of cottages—let as weekly tenements—be made liable for poor rates in the same way as owners of houses let in separate apartments or lodgings (Local Government Act, 62 (1)).

Viscount Corry, D.L., Fermanagh County Council, had moved that the Council was of the opinion that the Local Government Act, 1898, should be amended to allow:

(a) The number of members on an Asylum Committee, appointed by a County Council from outside their own body, to be "not more than one-half," instead of "not more than one-quarter," particularly in counties where the local asylum was not situated;
(b) The substitution of another member, as County Council representative, for the chairman of a Rural District Council, in any case where the latter was unwilling to serve on the County Council (such substitution already being permitted when the chairman was also an elected member of the County Council, or was otherwise disqualified);

(c) The election of three members instead of two for some of the larger Rural District Council electoral divisions, and one member instead of two for the very small ones.

Mr. Charles Convery, of Londonderry County Council, had submitted that:

(a) Meetings of the Irish County Councils' General Council should in future be held alternately in Cork, Belfast, and Derry;
(b) No official should be appointed to the Local Government Board in Ireland unless he had passed a Civil Service examination;
(c) The Council should request that Irish Members of Parliament seek to have the Local Government Act amended to provide for two half-yearly meetings to conduct the business of the County and District Councils, instead of the current four quarterly meetings.

Sir George Wolfe, J.P., Kildare County Council, had called attention to the significant hardship caused to ratepayers by extraordinary traffic on county roads, brought about by private individuals or Government departments, for which no adequate compensation had been received. He had moved a resolution that the laws dealing with such cases be extended to Ireland.[12]

The annual conference of the General Council of Irish County Councils for the year 1901 took place in Dublin at the turn of September, where many important issues affecting the administration of local public affairs in Ireland were discussed. It was remarked in the '*Cork Examiner*' that the General Council had been steadily growing in significance. Although it did not have official legal status, it held considerable influence with local authorities, and its resolutions were treated with respectful consideration by the Irish Government. This was only natural. From the beginning, it was noted, a handful of individuals—motivated by personal reasons—had attempted to criticise the Council,

[12] *Irish Daily Independent 24/8/1901*

downplay its influence, and hinder its objectives. However, those unwise efforts had faded over time. The Council had clearly grown stronger, and its authority had become widely acknowledged by County Councils, making such opposition tactics no longer effective or worthwhile.

It was highlighted that the General Council was composed of representatives from each of the thirty-three County Councils. Its main goal had been to provide a forum for exchanging ideas about local government—specifically, how it worked in practice, the flaws that had been identified in its administration, and the best ways to improve it so that local authorities could function more efficiently and economically. The Government appeared to have recognised that a body like this, made up of county delegates, could have been very valuable and might even have deserved official status and authority. In fact, as it was outlined, the Chief Secretary had written to Mr. Field, MP, assuring him that the next time a Local Government Bill was introduced in Parliament, it would include a clause to provide financial support for the General Council. This was regarded as encouraging. Modest financial assistance had already been given by the state to similar councils in England and Scotland, so there was no reason why it should have been denied to the Irish General Council.

The paper reported that many people—not just those involved in political disputes—had believed that the Government had approached the question of local government from the wrong end. They argued that the most effective check on waste or mismanagement by County or Borough Councils would have been an elected National Council—or better still, a National Parliament. Some short-sighted politicians had claimed that while it was safe to entrust local matters to elected representatives of the people, restoring a National Parliament would have led to chaos and revolution. If they still held those beliefs after three years of the Local Government Act in practice, they must have been in a state of wilful or hopeless ignorance. Overall, in their view, the County Councils had performed quite well, all things considered. However, it was opined that they could

have done far better had they been established under the authority of a National Parliament and Administration. Even so, the General Council had already made a valuable contribution during its existence, and its future seemed promising.

The main topic discussed at the conference was the structure and conduct of the Local Government Board and its relationship with the County Councils. While the Councils had faced significant public criticism since their creation, the Local Government Board itself had come under intense scrutiny—and not favourably. It had long been viewed with distrust by the general public, and its apparent hostility toward the new system of local governance had only deepened that suspicion. Its alleged interference in minor Council decisions had been unnecessary and irritating, while its decisions to award enormous salaries to officials—against the advice of local bodies familiar with the circumstances—had been widely condemned. The paper reported that Courts had even ruled such actions to be unwarranted and unlawful. Although careful oversight of County Council operations had been essential to protect the interests of ratepayers, it was opined that the Local Government Board had proven itself poorly suited to carry out such supervision effectively.[13]

In January 1902, the Parliamentary Committee of the Irish Trades Union Congress met at the Trades Hall in Capel Street, with Mr. Hugh McManus from Belfast presiding as chairman. Also present were Councillors Liddell from Belfast, McCarron from Londonderry, W. J. Leahy, and Messrs. John Simmons, Walter Hudson (vice-chairman), George Leahy (honorary treasurer), and E. L. Richardson (honorary secretary). Mr. Alex Bowman from Belfast sent his apologies for being unable to attend.

The Secretary then read his report, detailing several events from the latter part of 1901. Since their last meeting, on 30 August, the chairman, vice-chairman, and secretary had met by appointment with the Irish County Councils' General

[13] *Cork Examiner 2/9/1901*

Council to urge them to enforce the Fair Wages Resolution passed at the Sligo Congress. The deputation was received sympathetically, and after discussion, the chairman of the County Councils General Council, Sir Thomas Esmonde, assured them of his personal interest in the matter and recommended making similar representations to each County Council. He was confident this would be supported by the members present at that meeting. On 9 October, the same issue was brought before the Local Government Board by a deputation including Mr. Naughton, M.P., Mr. Brennan, Councillor McCarron, and the secretary. They referred specifically to the Limerick case, where the auditor had surcharged the Limerick County Council because they accepted a tender for county printing that complied with the Fair Wages Resolution but was £10 higher than another tender, which allegedly did not comply. It was argued that the auditor had failed to consider certain sections of the Local Government Act that, when read together, should allow him to uphold the intentions of Parliament rather than relying on just one clause. The deputation also urged the Board to instruct their auditors to consider the Fair Wages Resolution when assessing payments for contract work executed for local bodies in Ireland. The Vice-President of the Board, Sir Henry Robinson, responded sympathetically but could not promise to reopen the Limerick case. However, he assured them that any matter involving the Fair Wages Resolution would be carefully considered and that the Board was fully supportive of their aims.

Following the decision of the previous meeting, the secretary, working with the Dublin Trades Council and the Amalgamated Union of Shop Assistants, arranged a large meeting addressed by Sir Charles Dilke at the Ancient Concert Rooms on Tuesday evening, 8 October. A full report of this event appeared in the daily press, and the outcome was considered satisfactory. Regarding the issue of the second term of office for the Lord Mayor, after forwarding copies of the Congress's resolutions on this matter to the Dublin Corporation, a reply was received from the Town Clerk. The Corporation informed them that they had already instructed him to draft a Standing Order stating that no Lord

Mayor in Dublin would hold office for more than one year. However, they also noted that legal advice indicated such a Standing Order would be ultra vires (beyond their legal power) and could not be enforced. It appeared that the intended effect of the resolution was being achieved by candidates pledging during elections to oppose the practice of serving multiple consecutive terms.[14]

In August 1902, a general meeting of the Irish County Councils' General Council was held at Leinster Hall, Molesworth Street, Dublin City. Sir Thomas Esmonde, M.P., the chairman, presided. The following delegates were present: from Cavan, T. M'Govern, M.P.; Dublin, Joseph Mooney, J.P., William Field, M.P., and T. Brown; from Fermanagh, Viscount Corry, D.L.; Kerry, St. John H. Donovan, J.P.; Meath, James Kelly; King's County, P. Delaney, M.P.; Londonderry, J. E. O'Neill and Chas. Convery; Louth, T. J. Byrne and C. A. Duffy; Meath, J. Sweetman and F. Sheridan; Tipperary South Riding, J. E. Grubb; Wexford, Sir Thomas G. Esmonde, M.P., and Michael Browne; Belfast County Borough, P. J. Magee, J.P.; Waterford County Borough, W. G. D. Goff; and Monaghan, James Daly, ex-M.P. On the motion of Viscount Corry, D.L., seconded by Mr. Crozier, J.P., Sir Thomas Esmonde, M.P., was re-elected chairman for the ensuing year.

Sir Thomas Esmonde expressed his gratitude and said he took great interest in the Council's proceedings. He hoped that before long the Council would gain statutory recognition. At the time, there was a bill before Parliament aiming to achieve that goal. Once the body was legally constituted and able to do good for the country, he hoped they would find another chairman more capable of fulfilling the office's duties. He thanked the meeting again for the honour they had done him.

The Honorary Secretary, in his report, stated that as requested, he had written to various railway companies to ask if delegates to the General Council could receive reduced

[14] *Irish Daily Independent 11/1/1902*

fares when travelling to meetings. However, he received replies informing him that the Irish railway managers had considered the matter and decided not to grant this request. The Secretary also submitted a statement of the receipts and expenditures for the Council for the past year and mentioned that Mr. Joseph Dollard had generously supplied the printing for the General Council free of charge. The report was adopted. The Council then considered a series of new rules submitted by the Secretary. Mr. Sweetman explained that these rules were drafted based on the rules of the English County Councils Association, with slight modifications to better suit Ireland. After some discussion, the rules were adopted.

The following members were elected to constitute the Executive Committee for the coming year: Leinster—Joseph Mooney, J.P., John Sweetman, J.P., and T. J. Byrne, J.P.; Munster—St. John Henry, J. Ernest Grubb, and W. G. D. Goff; Ulster—Viscount Corry, D.L., J. E. O'Neill, and Mr. M'Govern, M.P.; Connaught—John Fitzgibbon, James P. M'Guire, and John Gaily. From the County Boroughs, Sir Thomas Pile (Dublin) and Mr. P. J. Magee (Belfast) were appointed. The chairman of the County Councils' General Council, Sir Esmonde, was ex-officio member of the Executive.

On considering a resolution on the agenda to call attention to the disappearance of the Equivalent Grant for Technical Instruction and to request the Council to consider the matter at their next meeting, Mr. Field, M.P., stated that in attempting to withdraw this grant, the Government was guilty of a gross breach of faith. The Chairman said that a resolution had been forwarded by the Bishops of Clonfert and Waterford, on behalf of the Archbishops and Bishops of Ireland, regarding this matter. He proposed adopting this resolution, which expressed strong protest against the Treasury's action in withholding or limiting the grant previously offered to all local authorities levying a local rate for technical instruction. The resolution pointed out that the Agricultural and Technical Instruction Act of 1899 provided only £65,000 annually for Ireland, whereas England received

nearly £1,000,000. The sum allocated to Ireland came mainly from Irish funds, and councils had levied rates based on a promise of an equivalent Treasury grant. If the grant was withheld, no part of the country would benefit from technical education under the Act. The resolution was to be forwarded to the First Lord of the Treasury, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Chief Secretary for Ireland, and Irish Members of Parliament. The Chairman explained that the entire difficulty arose from Treasury bureaucracy. When Sir Michael Hicks-Beach left the Treasury, the issue had been settled, but with the arrival of a new Chancellor, the whole matter had to be revisited. Mr. William Field, M.P., seconded the resolution.

Sir Thomas Pile stated that it was essential for the Executive Committee to take up the matter directly with the Chief Secretary, pressing strongly on the injustice of the situation from the viewpoint of county and borough councils. He believed that such direct representation would be more effective than simply forwarding resolutions. He proposed adding to the resolution that the Executive Committee should take immediate steps to press the Chief Secretary for Ireland and take further measures as necessary to ensure the speedy removal of the grievance. Mr. Magee said he believed every county council should pass a strongly worded resolution condemning the Government's actions regarding the grant. In Belfast, they were spending £100,000 on technical schools, based on the expectation that the annual grant would continue, so the announcement of its disappearance was a severe shock. The resolution, with Sir Thomas Pile's proposed addition, was passed unanimously.

On the motion of Mr. J. E. O'Neill, seconded by the chairman, the Council adopted a further resolution requesting the Government to include a clause in the Local Government (Ireland) Amendment Bill, 1902. This clause would empower Irish County Councils to promote Parliamentary bills for specific purposes, such as obtaining powers to construct and operate tramways and inland waterways and levy fares; establishing and managing ferries with fares; utilising natural resources like waterfalls and levying charges for their use;

carrying out arterial drainage schemes and reforestation; and creating county funds for special undertakings approved by the Privy Council. On the motion of Sir Sheridan, seconded by Mr. Joseph Mooney, the Council passed a resolution requesting the Local Government Board to suspend the operation of their order dated 17th July 1902, regarding the removal of harmless lunatics from workhouses to county asylums. After disposing of some formal business, the Chairman drew attention to the Public Libraries Act passed in the previous session, which enabled district councils to establish local public libraries, with costs provided from rates. The proceedings then concluded.[15]

During September 1902, a special meeting of the Tipperary County Technical Committee was held, with the Very Rev Dean McDowell, P.P., V.G., acting as chairman. The purpose of the meeting was to appoint delegates to join a deputation from the Irish County Councils' General Council to meet with the Chief Secretary in Dublin City the following day regarding the question of the Equivalent Grant. On the chairman's motion, seconded by Mr W. Daly, Rev. Canon Flavin of St Mary's was appointed. Canon Flavin thanked the committee for the compliment and promised to do all he could to advance the matter. On the motion of Mr K. A. Hackett, seconded by Mr Arnold Power, the Mayor was also appointed, with the chairman noting that he would be an influential and intelligent representative.[16]

Also in September 1902, the Chief Secretary for Ireland received a deputation from the Irish County Councils' General Council and the Technical Instruction Committee concerning the threatened withdrawal of the Government grant for technical instruction. Among the Southern delegates present were St John H. Donovan from Kerry and W. G. O. Goff from Waterford City. Various County and District Committees for Technical Instruction were also represented, including the Most Reverend Dr Sheehan from Waterford County and County Borough, James F. Barry, Mayor of

[15] *Belfast Newsletter 30/8/1902*

[16] *Cork Examiner 23/9/1902*

Limerick, J. O. Morgan from Tipperary County, Rev. Canon Flavin, P.P. of Clonmel, and Sir Thomas Pile, who introduced the deputation and invited Bishop Sheehan to present their views.

The Bishop of Waterford explained that they regarded the issue as extremely important and had come to ask the Chief Secretary to use his influence with the Treasury to ensure that the equivalent grant for technical instruction would continue without limitation in either duration or geographic scope. They wished the entire country to receive, permanently, a sum equivalent to what local rates could raise for technical instruction. The foundation of their claim was rooted in the Acts of 1889 and 1890 and the actions of the Science and Art Department at South Kensington. Over the ten years between those Acts, the Department had allocated £3,000 to Great Britain and Ireland for this purpose. However, in the same year, the Customs and Excise Local Taxation Act was passed, allowing councils in England, Scotland, and Wales to use the funds from that Act for technical education as they chose. For Ireland, the equivalent money was handed to the National Board and the intermediate Board for literary instruction rather than being set aside for technical education. In 1891, a fixed sum of £500 was given to Ireland specifically for technical education by the Department, since Ireland did not receive the Customs and Excise Grant for that purpose. Subsequently, the Department agreed to grant Ireland one penny for every penny raised locally for technical education, apart from what was covered by the Science and Art Directorate. This arrangement continued until 1899, when the Technical Instruction Act for Ireland was passed and came into effect on 1 April 1900. The Irish Department must have had a grant transferred from South Kensington for technical instruction on that date, and the only such grant was the equivalent grant they were now requesting to be continued. They also relied on the promise made by the Irish Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, on the basis of which local rates had been levied. The Bishop further argued that, in terms of technical education, Ireland was behind the rest of the civilised world and lacked a university popular with the people.

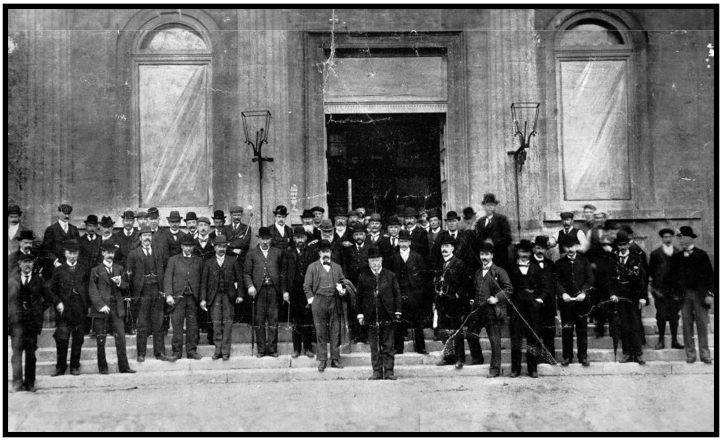
The Chief Secretary replied that the question before them was an important matter, although it caused some personal embarrassment. He explained that his role was to act as their ambassador to the Treasury and to approach it carefully, aware of the many pitfalls warned by Sir James Henderson, which might threaten the whole structure of local government in Ireland. He noted that the County Councils General Council was a relatively new body in Ireland but could have a great future. In England and Scotland, such representative bodies did a lot of preparatory work before submitting measures to Parliament or appeals to the Treasury. He was not able to give them the Treasury's decision that afternoon and believed that if he could, the whole process would be meaningless. He hoped that meetings like this would continue to play an active role in promoting decisions and shaping public opinion. He then addressed the Bishop of Waterford's speech, expressing regret that the Bishop himself was not presenting the case to the Treasury. The Chief Secretary moved on to a less agreeable point — that there was an argument to be answered. He explained that the grant was made available under section 3 of the Technical Instruction Act of 1889, which stated that the conditions on which Parliamentary grants might be made for technical or manual instruction would be contained in the minutes of the Science and Art Commissioners for the time being. It had been argued that these were merely enabling words and did not bind Parliament to make further grants. The 1891 Act did not affect the matter, so they might dismiss it.

Turning to the Agricultural and Technical Instruction Act of 1899, he also noted that this Act transferred certain responsibilities to the new Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction. The administration of the grant in aid of technical instruction was defined in the 1899 Act, which might be seen as merely an enactment section, leaving the wording ambiguous. On one hand, it could be interpreted as contemplating the permanent continuation of the grant. On the other hand, it might be understood that the 1899 Act put Ireland on equal footing with other parts of the United Kingdom regarding the technical instruction funds —

specifically £55,000 a year — which should be considered a substitute for, rather than an addition to, the Parliamentary grants made under earlier legislation. The Department had acted on the presumption that these grants would be permanently continued, and had done so in good faith for a year, but it became clear that the wording of the Act allowed for a different interpretation. He also pointed out that whenever the Treasury was prepared to extend funding temporarily, it was usually possible to use that fact to argue for a longer extension.

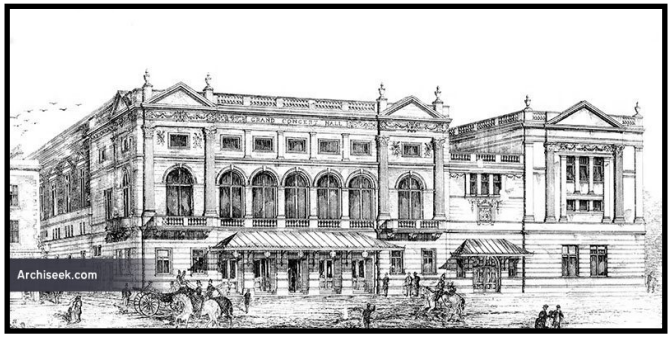
Regarding his own position, the Chief Secretary said that in June of that year, when the Budget had been passed, he had submitted certain circumstances to the Treasury. The moment to ask for a final decision had not yet arrived, but he planned to discuss this issue with his colleagues soon, emphasising Ireland's urgent need for technical instruction and the disadvantage suffered by Ireland compared to England and Scotland in losing the opportunity to access such education at the same time.[17]

[17] *Cork Examiner 24/9/1902*



Members of the first Galway County Council, as well as other associated individuals (*Galway County Archives*).

It was Sir Thomas Esmonde MP who presided over the General Council in its formative years (*National Portrait Gallery*).



Leinster Hall served as the meeting place of the General Council of Irish County Councils (*archiseek.com*).

BUILDING LOCAL DEMOCRACY

NAVIGATING POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE CHALLENGES, 1903-1906

In August 1903, as reported by the '*Irish Daily Independent*,' during a meeting of the parliamentary committee of the Irish Trades Union Congress, the committee, having dealt with a considerable amount of routine business, also undertook the appointment of a deputation to attend the annual meeting of the Irish County Councils' General Council regarding the matter of the operation of the Fair Wages Resolution.[18]

A special meeting of the General Council of the Irish County Councils was held during December 1903 in the Council Chamber, City Hall, Dublin, to consider a resolution regarding extra police taxes being demanded, particularly by the Sligo County Council. Mr Joseph Mooney presided, and among those present were Messrs John O'Dowd, M.P. (Sligo County Council), Thomas McGovern (Cavan), M Kelly (Clare), Thomas Power (Waterford), Thomas Duggan (North Tipperary), M. Cassidy (Donegal), John Fitzgibbon (Roscommon), Patrick Hanlon (Carlow), and James K. Donnalee (Wexford). Letters and telegrams were received from Viscount Corry, Sir Thomas Esmonde, M.P., and others.

The resolution, previously notified, stated that Sligo Council was being asked to pay £2,363 for extra police. The people protested this tax, arguing that the additional force was imposed on the County Council against the wishes of the elected representatives. The Chairman said he believed it would not be necessary to move the resolution.

Mr O'Dowd, M.P., reported that he had received a telegram from his County Council secretary, and another from Mr McTighe, stating that Dublin Castle had sent a letter confirming the Lord Lieutenant had cancelled the tax. He described this as a major victory for the County Council and all involved. The sum was considerable, and the Council's

[18] *Irish Daily Independent 3/8/1903*

refusal to pay had been upheld. He hoped the Government would treat other counties with similar demands fairly and remit those taxes as well.

Mr Power had congratulated Mayo County Council on successfully opposing the tax. He said that Waterford County had also been asked to pay over £500, but the Council had refused, believing there was no reason to station extra police in parts of the county. He described it as an outrageous attempt to impose charges on a few small districts, including Lismore, a very loyal area. The police present during a recent visit by the Duke of Devonshire were more than enough to maintain order. He expected the Lord Lieutenant to handle Waterford as he did Sligo.

Mr Fitzgibbon explained that a £300 demand had been made for extra police in the Custeran district, which he called a great injustice. The police, he noted, were being used as enforcers for landlords, intimidating tenants into paying unaffordable rents. The people had refused and did not intend to pay. Mr McGovern said the police had been deployed solely to support landlords' interests. Mr Duggan said North Tipperary was being asked for nearly £754 for extra police, including 250 extra officers for petty sessions during the trial of United Irish League (UIL) members in Templemore, County Tipperary. The rest of the charge was for police guarding a large grazier, who, along with his neighbours, was exempt while others living miles away were taxed. He said such unfair law deserved no respect and hoped the Government would follow the Sligo precedent for other counties.

On the motion of Mr Power, seconded by Mr Fitzgibbon, the following resolution was passed: the meeting was pleased to hear from Mr O'Dowd that the claim against Sligo had been withdrawn, making it unnecessary to adopt the original resolution. However, as similar claims exist elsewhere, the meeting called on the Government to follow Sligo's example and cancel those demands. On the motion of Mr Kelly, seconded by Mr Cassidy, another resolution was passed calling on the Government to remove the extra police

stationed in various parts of the country and reduce the regular force, stating that under current circumstances the expense of maintaining the police on the present scale was unnecessary. The proceedings then concluded.[19]

Later that month, the '*Cork Examiner*' expressed in an opinion piece that the announcement regarding Mr. William Bedmond, one of the representatives of the Co. Clare grouping, being informed that the Lord Lieutenant had decided to remit the tax for extra police was received with satisfaction, though with some reserve. The newspaper observed that the Lord Lieutenant's action in the case of Sligo had been the subject of some misunderstanding, and the satisfaction expressed at the remission of the tax in that instance was, according to some Unionist journals, entirely misplaced and premature. The '*Cork Examiner*' noted that it had been suggested that the Nationalist newspapers congratulating the Lord Lieutenant were unintentionally, but effectively, misled by the authorities. The '*Examiner*' admitted it did not find the situation particularly amusing, nor did it believe it had missed any subtle point, if such existed. It acknowledged the '*Irish Times*' and the '*Constitution*' for their attempts to see humour in the matter and to ridicule what they considered dull-witted Nationalists, but insisted that some clarification was necessary.

The newspaper pointed out that the circumstances appeared straightforward to the ordinary observer. It recalled that a meeting of the General Council of the Irish County Councils had recently taken place to consider a resolution moved by Mr. O'Dowd, M.P., denouncing the extra police tax levied on County Sligo. At the beginning of the meeting, Mr. O'Dowd announced that he had received a telegram from Mr. P. A. M'Hugh, M.P., informing him that the Lord Lieutenant had remitted the tax. Consequently, the delegates expressed congratulations, and, as Mr. O'Dowd's motion had become unnecessary, they passed another resolution calling on the Executive Government to follow the Sligo precedent in other counties where similar claims were pending. The '*Cork*

[19] *Cork Examiner 18/12/1903*

Examiner' asserted there was nothing remarkable in these proceedings. It emphasised that the representatives of the people had requested remission of an unfair tax, that remission was granted, that the people were pleased with the Lord Lieutenant's action, and that they recommended a similar approach elsewhere.

However, the '*Cork Examiner*' criticised the '*Irish Times*' for finding "humour" in what it regarded as a serious issue, describing this tendency as one of that paper's defining characteristics. The '*Examiner*' had acknowledged that a bit of innocent amusement was welcome during dull times, but felt that the '*Irish Times"* claim that the story would be laughable if it did not have serious consequences was a cautionary attempt to avoid appearing disrespectful. It also suggested there were serious matters at stake, that the '*Irish Times*' may have been downplaying.

According to the '*Irish Times*,' the '*Examiner*' reported, the tax was remitted because it should never have been imposed in the first place. This reason matched exactly the argument made by the people of Sligo. The '*Cork Examiner*' found it ironic and inappropriate that the '*Irish Times*' treated the official blunder—unjust taxation imposed by a civic authority—as a source of humour. The '*Examiner*' argued that such a supposedly misplaced jocularity demonstrated a lack of understanding of the workings of Dublin Castle and the realities of police rule in Ireland. It noted that the joke about an unjust and irritating tax was well known, but not appreciated in Ireland. The '*Irish Times*,' it stated, had provided detailed explanations of how the error came about, but the '*Cork Examiner*' maintained that the paper had misunderstood the official position. The '*Irish Times*' claimed the extra police sent to Sligo were not part of the ordinary local force and so should not have been charged to Sligo, but this explanation had no recognition from the authorities. The '*Examiner*' pointed out that extra police had always been charged without question, regardless of where they were brought from, and that charges for transport and other expenses were routine.

The '*Cork Examiner*' concluded that the charge should never have been imposed, a fact long acknowledged and sufficient reason for remission. It observed that in the county concerned, people had been paying for extra police for years despite the number actually stationed being less than the ordinary force. Finally, the '*Examiner*' reflected that while there had been many curious and unfair impositions in Irish taxation and administration, these should be the material for loyal newspapers to create serious, rather than humorous, commentary. It remarked that those who had been swindled into paying for excessive police to be used in evictions and enforcement viewed these disclosures much more seriously than the mild-mannered journalists who allegedly catered to the landlord and Unionist readership.[20]

During October 1904, according to the '*Irish Daily Independent*,' a contentious question raised at a special meeting of the General Council of Irish County Councils was inevitable. It was bound to come sooner or later, and it was well that it was brought to a head when it was. Whether a body purporting to be representative—one that met irregularly and lacked a clearly defined programme—was worth preserving at all, had become a matter of real debate. Conducted along the lines it had previously followed, its usefulness had never been particularly evident. County Councils had sent as delegates some of their ablest members, but the truth was that these delegates could not, and therefore did not, accomplish much. The idea of bringing together representatives from across Ireland, each with local knowledge of his own county's needs, to consult on matters of local administration arising from the Local Government Act, was unquestionably sound. Had it fulfilled the hopes of its founder, the Council might have become a valuable part of the country's political machinery. But dissatisfaction had clearly grown among the majority of County Councils regarding the General Council's operations. There was an increasing sense that attending its meetings and participating in its discussions had become, in the paper's view, a waste of time.

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[20] *Cork Examiner 29/12/1903*

Mr Thomas Power's resolution asserted that, if the Council was to have any real value, it must freely and openly debate matters concerning the public good. It declared that, as the representative body of the Irish County Councils—themselves elected by broad franchise and charged with voicing the sentiments of the people—it was only reasonable that the General Council should be allowed to consider issues such as Home Rule, the Land Question, labourers' rights, the Town Tenants' issue, and the pressing matter of education. The resolution read, in part:

> *"We desire to record our opinion that a free and untrammelled discussion should be permitted on subjects such as Home Rule, the Land Question, the claims of the labourers, the Town Tenants' Question, and the great question of Education, as it is idle to expect that this Council can achieve any permanent good while discussions on questions affecting the vital interests of Ireland are forbidden in this assembly."*

The '*Independent*' stated that it could see nothing in the wording of this resolution that could be reasonably objected to. The County Councils, it asserted, were the primary representative bodies in Ireland and, in the main, had discharged their duties with credit. While it had been said that the Council had tried to work within its narrow, non-political remit and had failed, the reality was that—with the exception of the gains made regarding the police tax—it had achieved little. If the Council was not to die a quiet death, something had to be done to restore its relevance.

The withdrawal of the Unionist delegates, the paper believed, was regrettable, though it failed to see any compelling reason for it. Up until this point, it was reported, those delegates had worked amicably with their colleagues across the political divide. Their views had always been received with respect, and their presence had been welcomed by their Nationalist counterparts. In any discussions relating to public welfare, the Unionists would have remained as free to express their

opinions as any member of the majority. Only good, the editorial continued, could come from an honest and respectful exchange of views among Irishmen from different political traditions. While unanimity could not always be expected, such engagement might well foster greater tolerance and mutual understanding. For these reasons, the Independent reiterated its position: there was no sufficient cause for the Duke of Abercorn and his allies to withdraw from the Council.

The article also noted the alleged irony of Unionist objections, pointing out that in the north of Ireland, where Unionists were in the majority on local boards, political issues were regularly raised without protest. If Nationalists in the minority were to withdraw in response, their constituents would quickly hold them to account. Under the former regime, political topics had been common fare at such meetings. Why, then, the paper asked, should they now be considered inappropriate?[21]

Also in October 1904, it was documented that, in the view of the '*Cork Examiner*,' the suggested dissolution of the General Council of the Irish County Councils was regrettable for many reasons, particularly given the prevailing circumstances at the time. While the Council had not achieved any major reforms during its short existence, the newspaper regarded it as a worthwhile and interesting experiment. Had it proven successful, it might have led to significant and beneficial developments in public administration. The '*Examiner*' acknowledged that conflict was perhaps inevitable when issues of practical and pressing interest came under discussion. It believed, however, that this did not justify the Northern representatives' decision to withdraw simply because certain topics, which they deemed controversial or unwelcome, were introduced. The editorial suggested that this action reflected poorly on the common-sense expected of such a body, especially when meetings between Northern and Southern representatives had

[21] *Irish Daily Independent 21/10/1904*

previously been conducted with vigour and without damaging either local or national interests.

The paper argued that if Catholic members in Ulster-based county councils had similarly withdrawn every time a topic conflicted with their religious or political beliefs, their constituents would likely have called for their replacement by more pragmatic and resilient individuals. Thus, while the timing of the break was indeed unfortunate, the Cork Examiner laid the blame squarely on the Northern Unionist members. The resolutions that prompted their withdrawal, the editorial noted, concerned issues of significant national importance—issues no representative body could be expected to indefinitely avoid. There was nothing inherently offensive in the language of the resolutions. The primary resolution in question, introduced by Mr Thomas Power, proposed expanding the scope of the Council's deliberations to include vital national matters such as Home Rule, land reform, the rights of labourers, the needs of town tenants, and the pressing issue of education. Mr Power's resolution asserted that the Council, as a representative body voicing the views of the County Councils and, by extension, the Irish people, must be free to discuss all matters affecting public welfare. He argued it was unreasonable to expect the Council to be effective while barred from debating the key issues affecting the nation.

The '*Cork Examiner*' also dismissed objections from the Duke of Abercorn and his Northern colleagues—who claimed that this amounted to "introducing politics"—as overly sensitive and un-constructive. The paper opined that a council made up of Ireland's most experienced and capable public figures should have been well-equipped to discuss national questions in a rational and moderate fashion. In its view, the General Council had the potential to evolve into a great national assembly with the moral and intellectual authority to influence all facets of public life in Ireland. The Council, the editorial reminded readers, was created through a scheme put forward by Sir Thomas Esmonde, and its legitimacy had been recognised in the 1902 Local Government (Ireland) Act, which allowed County Councils

to appoint representatives and contribute financially to the Council's operation. Nonetheless, the '*Cork Examiner*' lamented that the General Council had led a feeble existence, exerting little influence on national affairs, and was at risk of fading into irrelevance. The ongoing crisis, it suggested, might yet spark new interest and bring revitalisation to the General Council, encouraging exploration of its potential as a genuinely national body.

The paper noted that even Unionist concerns had been addressed with balance and restraint during the debate. Mr Power had effectively argued that the Council's reluctance to discuss political matters had left it largely ineffective. The only time the Council had tackled a substantive issue—over the controversial taxation for extra police—it had succeeded in securing major remissions from the Castle authorities. On the opposing side, Mr John Fitzgibbon had argued that open debate, including on contentious subjects such as Home Rule, could foster mutual understanding. He contended that Irish people were fully capable of governing themselves, and, as an Irish Catholic, he would prefer to be governed by a Protestant Parliament in Dublin than a Catholic one in London. In the '*Cork Examiner's*' judgement, no reasonable objection could have been made to the General Council's attempt to elevate itself to meet the responsibilities of its time. It was suggested that, if some Northern representatives chose to withdraw, then it was for the rest of Ireland to step forward in support. The editorial encouraged Southern counties that had not yet appointed delegates to consider doing so, arguing that the General Council, free from restrictive rules, might yet prove a powerful influence on the government of the day—regardless of which party held office.[22]

In late October, the '*Irish Daily Independent*' reported that Armagh County Council had prepared to bring its continued affiliation with the General Council of County Councils into question.[23] Around that same time, a meeting of the South

[22] *Cork Examiner 22/10/1904*

[23] *Irish Daily Independent 28/10/1904*

Tipperary constituency of the Irish Parliamentary Party was held in the Glen of Aherlow, with Mr. John Cullinan, MP, MCC addressing the gathering. Mr. W. O'Callaghan proposed, with Mr. Denis Noonan seconding, a motion was passed which congratulated the General Council of Irish County Councils for:

> "*Having at their last meeting asserted the rights of that body to deal with all the great questions concerning the welfare of our country, especially that of self-government*."[24]

In November 1904, the '*Irish Daily Independent*' reported that the Londonderry County Council addressed the ongoing developments concerning the General Council of Irish County Councils. Following discussion, the Council adopted the following resolution, proposed by Mr A. L. Clark, J.P., and seconded by Mr A. L. Hamilton. The resolution asserted that, in view of the decision by the County Councils Association to permit the discussion of political subjects at its meetings, despite the original resolution at its formation explicitly excluding such matters, the County Council of Londonderry regretted that, so long as the Association continued to allow such discussions, it faced no option but to decline to participate in its deliberations. Mr M. J. Henry recorded his dissent. This resolution marked a clear stance by Derry County Council, expressing great concern that the Association had departed from its founding principle of political neutrality.[25]

The '*Irish Daily Independent*' also documented that, later that month, at its quarterly meeting, Wicklow County Council had unanimously adopted a resolution in favour of the establishment of a Roman Catholic University. The Council resolved to place the matter before the General Council of County Councils at its forthcoming meeting on 12th January 1905, and instructed its representatives to impress upon the Government the vital and urgent public

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[24] *Cork Examiner 28/10/1904*

[25] *Irish Daily Independent 15/11/1904*

importance of the proposal. The newspaper reported that a Unionist member—who, it appeared, had himself benefited from a university education at Trinity College Dublin/TCD (which barred participation from Roman Catholics)—raised the customary objections characteristic of his party's opposition to Catholic claims. He contended that the discussion of such matters fell outside the remit of the General Council's programme. However, according to the paper, his arguments were ably and convincingly countered by several speakers who engaged in a reasoned and notably temperate debate on the subject. In the '*Irish Daily Independent's*' view, the Unionist objections were neither novel nor compelling. Their position on this matter had, over time, been thoroughly discredited in both logic and public opinion. At that stage, in the paper's view, such arguments had scarcely merited a serious consideration.[26]

In December 1904, Dublin Corporation selected Councillor Mr. James Crozier J.P. to represent the city council on the General Council of County Councils for the forthcoming term.[27]

The annual meeting of the General Council of Irish County Councils was held at City Hall, Dublin, with Sir Thomas Esmonde, Bart., presiding as chair. This January 1905 meeting saw Mr. Thomas Byrne (Louth) propose the re-election of Sir Thomas Esmonde as chairman for the coming year, which was unanimously agreed upon. Mr. John Sweetman was re-elected vice-chairman, and the Executive Committee was also returned without change. Mr. Richardson, secretary of the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Council, submitted a letter enclosing resolutions previously passed by the Trades Council. These urged that county councils and other public bodies should include the Fair Wages Clause of the House of Commons in all tender documents. The resolutions also criticised the awarding of public contracts to firms acting merely as agents for foreign manufacturers. Mr. Cullinan, M.P., moved that the General

[26] *Irish Daily Independent 28/11/1904*

[27] *Irish Daily Independent 20/12/1904*

Council adopt the Trades Council's resolutions, seconded by Mr. O'Dowd, M.P. The Chairman ruled that the matter could not be formally considered without prior notice, but stated he would bring it forward at the next meeting. In the interim, the issue was referred to the Executive Committee. The secretary of Derry County Council wrote to inform the Council that, following the recent decision to allow the discussion of political subjects, Derry would no longer participate in the General Council's deliberations or contribute to its funding. Similar letters were received from the Down and Antrim County Councils, both of which also resolved to sever ties with the General Council. Sir Samuel Black, Town Clerk of Belfast, forwarded a resolution from Belfast Corporation, explaining its withdrawal due to the General Council's departure from its original apolitical purpose. In contrast, the Waterford County Council endorsed the General Council's decision to expand its remit to include those of national matters, describing the move as a necessary reform. Mr. Walter Kavanagh, D.L. (Carlow), unable to attend, expressed in writing his disappointment at the Northern withdrawals. He believed that dialogue among Irishmen of all political persuasions was essential for mutual understanding, and he welcomed the General Council as a platform for national discussion.

Sir Thomas Esmonde proposed a resolution declaring that the Irish people had the right to self-government, that only a Parliament sitting in Ireland could legitimately make laws for the country, and that any external body claiming to do so was acting illegally and unconstitutionally. He explained that the resolution mirrored the principles of the Irish Volunteers and a historic declaration by the Irish Parliament. He suggested, with the Council's agreement, that the wording be softened slightly to say that the Irish people "ought to be free" rather than stating they already were. He argued that the Act of Union was illegal and would remain so unless and until Irish people willingly accepted it, which he believed would never happen.Mr. Sweetman of Meath seconded the resolution. Dr. O'Ryan of Tipperary expressed hope that new elections within six months might change the composition of the General Council and lead to the return of the Northern

representatives. Mr. O'Gorman from County Waterford remarked that Irish civilisation had existed while the English were still living as savages. The resolution, as amended, was passed. Mr. Sweetman then proposed a motion opposing the planned International Exhibition, arguing it would hinder efforts to promote Irish-made goods. He urged supporters to instead back a National Exhibition that would showcase Irish manufacturing and encourage the public to buy local products. Mr. Cullinan, M.P., seconded this motion. Mr. Joseph Mooney, J.P., of Dublin, opposed the resolution, arguing that an international exhibition would provide valuable opportunities to learn from foreign industries. He said that if Irish industries were not afraid of competition, then no harm would come from such an event. He also noted that several individuals who now opposed the international exhibition, including the Lord Mayor and former Lord Mayor, had previously supported it. He pointed out that over £106,000 had been raised for the international exhibition and questioned how much had been collected for a national one. Mr. Reynolds from Longford agreed with Mooney, stating that Irish manufacturers were capable of matching international standards. Mr. Crozier, J.P., added that the exhibition could provide employment for thousands in Dublin. Mr. Byrne of Louth supported the international event, while Mr. Brennan from Sligo expressed concern that fledgling Irish businesses should not be forced to compete with wealthy foreign companies. Mr. McDonnell from Galway noted that some backers of the international exhibition were primarily motivated by the hope of bringing British royalty to Ireland and securing titles. He suggested that in the future, King Edward might be invited to open not just a national exhibition, but also an Irish Parliament. Dr. O'Ryan remarked that the previous exhibition in Cork had done little good for Ireland and reaffirmed his support for a national exhibition. The motion in favour of a National Exhibition and against the international one passed by a vote of twelve to five.

Turning to the subject of Irish industry, Mr. Sweetman proposed that public bodies should use Irish-made goods wherever reasonably possible, and also that agricultural

committees should promote tillage, drawing inspiration from the old Irish Parliament, which supported farming through subsidies. He stressed that without manufacturing jobs, people would continue to emigrate, and that Irish-made goods could only survive if there was consistent demand for them. Mr. Brennan seconded the motion. Mr. P. A. Meehan from Queen's County argued that Irish manufacturers should follow the example of their mainland British and European counterparts in promoting their products. He shared a case where Scottish linen was shipped to Belfast and falsely marketed as Irish-made. Mr. Byrne suggested compiling and distributing a list of Irish manufacturers to local authorities. Meehan proposed an addition to the resolution, urging Irish manufacturers to actively publicise their products to public bodies and the general public. Sweetman accepted this amendment, and the full resolution passed.

On the topic of education, Mr. B. P. O'Kelly of County Wicklow proposed that Catholic youth should receive the same opportunities for higher education as their Protestant counterparts, enabling them to contribute more effectively to the country's industrial growth. He lamented that many talented students were unable to afford membership in the Royal University, which he described as inadequate. Mr. O'Dowd seconded the motion, and it was carried. Mr. Field then proposed that councils should work together to acquire waste lands suitable for reforestation, and that the Government should fund the establishment of a Forestry Department. Mr. McDonnell seconded the resolution, which passed. The Council concluded its meeting after passing several additional resolutions, including support for dual representation on district councils and a call for opposition to British regulations on the importation of Irish pigs.[28]

In March 1905, at a meeting of the Law and Finance Committee of Cork Corporation, the matter of resolutions passed at the recent annual meeting of the General Council of Irish County Councils, was examined. These resolutions addressed a broad range of issues, including national self-

[28] *Belfast Newsletter 13/1/1905*

government, the promotion of Irish manufacturing and tillage, the proposal for a National Exhibition, the Catholic University question, potential amendments to the Local Government (Ireland) Acts and related regulations, the importation of Irish pigs into England, re-afforestation in Ireland, bicycle lighting regulations, the duties of county and deputy surveyors, and outdoor relief for elderly and destitute married couples.

According to an editorial of the '*Evening Echo*,' the Secretary brought these resolutions to the attention of the Committee, who then decided to refer them all to the city Corporation's Law Agent. The article questioned this decision, describing it as excessive and impractical. The writer argued that the Law Agent already had enough responsibilities without being asked to produce reports on issues of national scope. While acknowledging that referring the proposed legislative amendments to the Law Agent was appropriate, the editorial criticised the Committee's failure to take immediate action on the other topics. The opinion piece expressed surprise that such important national matters were not met with a resolution of support from the Committee, pending endorsement by the full City Council. The editorial contended that this course of action would have resonated positively with the public. Delegating all the resolutions to the Law Agent, it concluded, imposed an unreasonable burden on him — one that, in the writer's view, might earn him sympathy even from his harshest critics.[29]

In late March, a special meeting of the General Council of Irish County Councils was held at the City Hall, Dublin, to consider a newly issued Public Bodies' Order. Several representatives from various County Councils around Ireland expressed opposition to the Order, citing concerns about its practical impact. After discussion, it was agreed that a deputation should be sent to the Local Government Board (L.G.B.) to raise these concerns, particularly regarding the hardships the Order was expected to impose. Mr. P. J. O'Neill, J.P., Chairman of Dublin County Council, who

[29] *Evening Echo 14/3/1905*

presided over the meeting, stated that there was no evidence of mismanagement under the current administration to justify the introduction of the new Order. He challenged the Local Government Board to produce any statement by an official suggesting that the existing forms were ineffective or harmful to ratepayers. He further criticised the Board for encouraging Urban Councils to make special demands for relief from county-wide charges, which had led to costly and prolonged legal proceedings for the County Council. He welcomed the decision of the Superior Court, which had ruled in favour of the County Council and against the Local Government Board. O'Neill pointed out that an impartial committee of the House of Commons had previously rejected a similar Order from the Local Government Board without even requiring the County Council to present its objections, highlighting that the Board was not infallible. He argued that the Board had demonstrated continued administrative failings and a lack of understanding of the issues they were meant to oversee.

He also referenced a decision by the Lord Chief Baron that supported the County Council's view, which required Urban Councils to make advance payments in support of the Boards of Governors of Lunatic Asylums. However, he stated that the Local Government Board had since interfered by instructing Urban Councils to delay such payments to the County Council by two months. This, he said, would severely hinder the Council's ability to function. The Board's suggestion to use the advance Agricultural Grant for this purpose was firmly rejected by the County Council, which had no intention of reallocating that funding as proposed. O'Neill asserted that the Board's actions consistently hindered the work of local authorities, and that the imposition of the Order would make effective local administration impossible.

Several other members voiced their opinions. Mr. Byrne (Louth) noted that his Council had proposed the meeting and believed the Order might improve efficiency and oversight of officials. He disagreed with the view that it would significantly increase clerical workloads. Mr. Donovan

(Tralee) stated that his Council intended to comply with the Order, only to the minimum extent required. Mr. M'Donnell (Galway) suggested that a deputation should meet with the Local Government Board regarding the issue. Mr. O'Kelly (Ballinasloe) believed the Board had exceeded its legal authority (ultra vires) in issuing the Order. Mr. Thomas Corcoran (Tipperary) reported that North Tipperary County Council opposed the Order due to the increased costs it would entail. Mr. Field, M.P., added that the cost of local administration in Ireland was already excessive and that reforms should aim at reducing, rather than increasing, public expenditure. Mr. Donohoe (Wexford) stressed the need for a united stance of resistance to avoid being overruled. Mr. Joseph Mooney, J.P., supported the proposal to send a deputation, suggesting that the Local Government Board might still be open to reason. He hoped that a meeting could lead to the withdrawal or significant amendment of the Order to meet practical needs. Mr. Crozier agreed with Mr. Mooney's position. In conclusion, the Chairman, along with Mr. Field, Mr. Mooney, Mr. O'Kelly, and Mr. MacDonnell, were selected to form the deputation to meet with the Local Government Board to present the concerns of the Council regarding the Public Bodies' Order.[30]

During an August 1905 meeting of the Law and Finance Committee of Cork Corporation, it was mentioned that the Town Clerk had written to both the Association of Municipal Authorities and the Irish County Councils' General Council, requesting their assistance in lobbying Members of Parliament (MPs). Both bodies responded positively. The Association of Municipal Authorities not only issued circulars to their affiliated bodies, but also arranged for their president, Sir Alfred Rutter, to attend at the House of Commons. Sir Alfred not only voted himself against the Bill in question, but also actively sought to influence as many members as possible to vote against its recommittal, if such a motion arose. The Town Clerk received formal confirmation of these efforts in a letter from the Association. During a discussion on the matter, Mr. Nicholas O'Keeffe inquired

[30] *Irish Independent 29/3/1905*

about the financial cost of the city Corporation's opposition to the Bill. Mr. B. O. Galvin responded that the expenditure was approximately one thousand pounds. Mr. O'Keeffe asked whether or not Cork City's ratepayers could take legal action over this cost. Mr. Galvin also explained that in matters of parliamentary campaigning, each side was responsible for its own expenses. Mr. O'Keeffe further questioned whether similar interventions from individuals or groups based in London could occur again at will. Mr. Galvin replied that the only real safeguard was financial—pointing out that for every pound spent by the city Corporation, their opponents had to spend five. The discussion then concluded.[31]

As reported by the '*Freemans Journal*,' later in August, the Irish County Councils' General Council met in the Council Chamber of City Hall, with Sir Thomas Esmonde, M.P., presiding. There was a large and representative attendance. Mr. James Crosier, T.C., proposed the re-election of Sir Thomas Esmonde as chairman for the coming year, a motion seconded by Mr. O'Dowd, M.P., and unanimously approved. The chairman thanked the Council for their confidence and promised to do his best in the role, hoping that the institution would now become more active and prominent within the National Council. Mr. Sweetman was also re-elected as vice-chairman. The Irish Trades Union Congress Parliamentary Committee sent a resolution thanking the County Councils' General Council for its unanimous recommendation that all local government bodies in Ireland adopt the Fair Wages Resolution. The chairman confirmed that their secretary would send a formal acknowledgement of thanks to the Trades Congress.

Louth County Council requested that their representatives on the Agricultural Council raise the issue of improving the veterinary dispensary system. They suggested that if the system was approved in principle, detailed statistics should be collected, and a draft scheme prepared to estimate the cost and usefulness of the service. They further proposed that the

[31] *Skibbereen Eagle 5/8/1905*

£25,000 currently spent annually on veterinary inspection under the Diseases of Animals Act, along with the salaries of veterinary inspectors, might be supplemented from local funds once the necessary training programmes were completed, likely providing enough resources to support the scheme.

Discussion then arose from correspondence between the Secretary, the Local Government Board (L.G.B.), and the Commissioner of Valuation regarding the timing of rate assessments. Joseph Mooney presented revised valuation lists for the Dublin Rural District from previous years, showing that the lists were not supplied before 1st March, contrary to the official statement claiming they were issued by 1st February. Consequently, rate assessments were often based on old valuations because the updated lists were unavailable in time. Mooney proposed, and Mr. Grubb seconded, that the Local Government Board be informed of the error and asked to correct their practice. This resolution was expanded to include Urban Districts and was carried by the Council.

The annual report reflected the widespread desire among delegates to broaden the Council's role to include discussions on all matters affecting public welfare. At a special meeting in October 1904, the Council resolved that it should allow open and unrestricted debate on key issues such as public health, land reform, labour conditions, tenant rights, and education. The Council recognised that it could not achieve meaningful progress if such vital topics were restricted. Some Ulster-based County Councils disagreed with this decision and consequently withdrew from the General Council, including the County Councils of Antrim, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry, Tyrone, and the County Borough Council of Belfast. However, this loss was offset by new affiliations from the County Councils of Mayo, Monaghan, Cavan, Westmeath, and King's County, along with the County Borough Councils of Cork and Limerick. The Council now represented twenty-eight County Councils and three County Borough Councils. There had also been considerable dissatisfaction with the Public Bodies Order of

1904. After consulting all County Councils and gathering their objections, the General Council convened a special meeting in March and appointed a deputation to present their concerns directly to the Local Government Board. In response, Sir Henry Robinson explained that the new Order was mandated by the Local Government Act of 1902 and that the Board intended to implement it gradually as current stocks of forms were used up. He assured that any objections submitted by the Councils would be carefully considered and addressed where possible. The deputation's report was immediately shared with all Councils. Following the Council's instructions, the Executive Committee forwarded several recommendations to the Local Government Board aimed at improving the operation of the Local Government Act. Progress on these representations had already been communicated to the Council.

Since the last meeting, it was reported that the General Council had received an invitation from the Catholic Graduates and Undergraduates' Association for the chairman, Sir Thomas Esmonde, to participate or nominate a representative to join a committee tasked with organising a conference on the 'University Question.' Sir Thomas brought the matter before the Executive Committee, which authorised him to collaborate with other nominated gentlemen until the annual meeting, when the issue would be formally addressed. The Executive Committee also expressed gratitude to the Lord Mayor and the city Corporation of Dublin for their kindness in making City Hall available for the Council's meetings.[32]

By November 1905, the Secretary of the County Councils' General Council wrote to inform that on December 8th the Council would discuss the role and powers of County Councils in Ireland, regarding support for university education. The Secretary requested that the North Tipperary County Council submit any related matters for consideration. During the meeting, resolutions from Dublin and Waterford

[32] *Freemans Journal 26/8/1905*

County Councils were presented, emphasising the urgent need for higher education opportunities for Roman Catholics. Mr. Hanly expressed support for adopting these resolutions, while Mr. Duggan noted that the County Councils' General Council had previously considered using part of the penny rate to help establish a Catholic University. He highlighted that it was important for each County Council to contribute ideas on how to allocate funds for this purpose. The Chairman posed the key question of how such money could be effectively dedicated to this cause, and Mr. Kenna added that legal advice was being sought on the matter. The Council then unanimously adopted the resolutions.[33]

In mid-December, Sir Thomas Esmonde, M.P., chairman, presided over a meeting of the Irish County Councils' General Council. At the request of a deputation from the Gaelic League, the members passed a resolution—already approved by the Wexford County Council—in support of a scheme for university scholarships under the various county councils, which would require successful students to have knowledge of the Irish language. The Gaelic League deputation, which included Miss Hayden, Miss Agnes O'Farrelly, M.A., Mr. Thomas O'Donnell, M.P., and Alderman W. Cole, appeared before the meeting to discuss university scholarships. Mr. O'Donnell explained that their purpose was to ensure that any scholarships founded by the county councils made the teaching of Irish a compulsory element. He felt it unnecessary to argue the point with such a sympathetic body as the General Council and believed simply raising the matter was enough. Miss Hayden, warmly received, stressed that the scholarships should be designed so girls could compete on equal terms with boys, moving from primary to secondary education and then on to university colleges. She argued this was vital not just for the girls themselves but for future generations, noting that no native Irish-speaking woman had yet received a university education. She further highlighted that current Irish-speaking teachers had limited training beyond the language, and that instructresses in practical skills like poultry-keeping and

[33] *Nenagh Guardian 18/11/1905*

lacemaking should be fluent Irish speakers. Overall, she believed it was more important for girls to benefit from these scholarships than boys. Miss O'Farrelly, applauded by the meeting, said the Gaelic League viewed compulsory Irish instruction as essential in the scholarships scheme because it would spread conversational knowledge of Irish widely rather than create only a few Irish scholars. She noted public bodies had shown sympathy for the movement, and this was an opportunity to do something practical for the language. She added that the future role of Irish in university education would depend heavily on how county councils approached these scholarships.

Alderman Cole expressed his support for the deputation's views. The Chairman assured the Council's full sympathy with the deputation's aims, noting that counties such as Wexford had already shown strong support for the revival of the Irish language. He emphasised there was no intention to exclude women from scholarship benefits and was confident no council member would oppose the inclusion of ladies. Mr. M. A. Ennis of Wexford moved that the resolution passed by Wexford County Council be adopted by the General Council. The resolution proposed that over the next three years, the county council would annually award two scholarships of £40 each, tenable for three years, to two students who achieved the best results in the experimental science group of the Intermediate programme, provided they passed in Irish and other subjects required for university admission without further exams. The motion was seconded by Mr. Henry Brennan of Sligo. Dr. O'Ryan of Tipperary expressed concern that adopting this scheme might play into the Government's hands by giving them an excuse to delay or refuse the establishment of a national university. Mr. Glynn of Galway argued that taxing the people for education was no substitute for the creation of a national university. He proposed an amendment that where county councils adopt the scholarship scheme, Irish should be a compulsory subject in the qualifying and subsequent examinations connected to these scholarships. Mr. Ennis accepted this amendment. Mr. James Harman of County Cavan called for a representative body of Commissioners on the National Board to replace the

current Commissioners. Mr. John Sweetman of Meath, supporting the motion, said it was a mistake to delay further on university education and recommended that every county council create the scholarships as suggested by Mr. Glynn. Mr. P. J. O'Neill of Dublin also emphasised that these scholarships were not intended to replace a university but rather to strengthen the demand by showing the country's commitment to education. Mr. Grubb of South Tipperary hoped to see a fully functioning national university soon, where people of all faiths, including Quakers like himself, Protestants, and Catholics, could learn together in harmony.

The Chairman, putting the amended motion, declared that adopting the proposed scheme would advance university education more than anything done so far. He stated that if the British Government refused to grant a university, the Irish people were determined to establish one regardless. He added that the scholarships aimed to help poor children access education. Responding to Mr. Grubb, he mentioned that for every pound the county councils contributed to scholarships, the Government or the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction would match it. The motion and scheme were then adopted amid applause. Mr. O'Donnell, M.P., thanked the Council, recognising the significant work it had done for Ireland that day.[34]

In February 1906, at a meeting of the Tipperary (South Riding) County Council, a letter was read from the Secretary of the Irish County Councils' General Council, presenting for the County Council's consideration a draft scheme for the establishment of university scholarships by county councils. This scheme had been unanimously approved by the General Council. Additionally, a further resolution concerning scholarships from primary to secondary schools was also forwarded for consideration. Another letter from the Secretary of the General Council was read, outlining resolutions passed at the meeting held on 8th December 1905. These resolutions included a demand for the replacement of the existing Board of Education with a more

[34] *Connaught Telegraph 16/12/1905*

representative board, while opposing the creation of a separate department of education. The General Council also emphasised the urgent need to provide higher education in Ireland. Attention was drawn to the challenges faced by Rural District Councils in implementing sewerage systems within their areas. The Estates Commissioners were urged to fully exercise their powers under the Land Act of 1903 in support of labourers. Support was expressed for the establishment of a veterinary dispensary system. The Council also endorsed motions by the South Riding County Council of Tipperary, affirming the claims of county councils to control over courthouses, as well as backing the North Riding County Council in its opposition to the imposition of an additional police tax. These matters were subsequently referred to the County Council for further action.[35]

By April 1906, as reported in the '*Northern Standard*,' the Irish County Councils' General Council had passed a resolution, which had been circulated to all County Councils across the country, stating that a veterinary dispensary system providing affordable veterinary care for labourers and small farmers would be highly beneficial in the public interest. In response, Mr T. P. Gill, Secretary of the Department of Agriculture, wrote to Queen's County Council expressing that the Department viewed the matter as complex and requiring much more thorough consideration than it had otherwise received by that time from various public bodies. Mr Gill advised that it would be premature for any public bodies, whether supporting or opposing the proposal, to push for a speedy decision. Meanwhile, the Department had intended to gather further information on the issue.[36]

In May, the Irish County Councils' General Council had passed a timely resolution regarding the case of *Maguire v. Cavan County Council*. They noted that the judgment in this case went further than any previous decisions. Therefore, they agreed that, as suggested by Messrs. Denis Henry, K.C., and Lew Smith, K.C., the County Councils should consider

[35] *Nationalist and Munster Advertiser 21/2/1906*

[36] *Northern Standard 7/4/1906*

seeking the Local Government Board's approval to join with the Cavan County Council in sharing the costs of an appeal to the House of Lords. Given the relatively small amount of damages involved, it would not be reasonable for Cavan County Council to bear the expense alone.[37]

In July, a special meeting of the Irish County Councils' General Council was held at Dublin's City Hall to consider a resolution brought forward by Louth County Council, protesting a recent alteration to the army meat tender regulations. The resolution condemned the change allowing contractors to supply foreign meat, killed at the port of arrival, instead of native home-bred meat — a policy which was previously encouraged by the late Government in support of the Irish agricultural industry. The meeting was convened by a coalition of County Council representatives, including Peter Hughes (Chairman, Louth), J.J. Byrne (Vice-Chairman, Louth), and P.J. O'Neill (Chairman, Dublin), among others. Apologies for absence were received from several prominent members, including Sir Thomas Esmonde, Bart., M.P.

In his opening remarks, the Chairman emphasised the profound consequences of this policy shift for Ireland, an overwhelmingly agricultural country. Historically, the British War Office had required that beef supplied to the army be "home-bred," supporting local farmers and economies. The new regulation, however, permitted meat from animals raised abroad—specifically from the United States, Canada, and Argentina—to be imported live and slaughtered at British ports. This change was of particular concern given the scale of army consumption, which amounted to approximately 164,250 cattle annually, valued at nearly £2.8 million. The Chairman warned that redirecting this demand away from Irish producers threatened the livelihood of tenant farmers, many of whom had purchased their lands with government financial assistance. This policy risked undermining the very security of land purchase schemes by weakening the local cattle trade and agricultural prosperity.

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[37] *Roscommon Herald 19/5/1906*

He also criticised the Government's apparent departure from its Free Trade principles, suggesting the move prioritised cheap feeding for British soldiers over the welfare of Irish agriculture.

Mr. Byrne, Vice-Chairman of Louth County Council, characterised the change as a severe injustice, likening it to historical economic damage inflicted on Ireland by past English governments. He argued that this modern policy was motivated by an intent to save a few thousand pounds a year for the English taxpayer, at the expense of Irish farmers and their prosperity. Mr. Henry Brennan of Sligo County Council called on Parliament to act decisively, highlighting concerns about the safety and quality of imported tinned meats, which might have contributed to illness among soldiers. He stressed the importance of protecting Irish cattle and the agricultural sector in line with the Government's earlier promises. Mr. Ennis of Wexford lamented that Ireland had derived no benefit from the recent South African war but had borne the brunt of related costs, compounded by this blow to the cattle industry. He emphasised the need for clarity on the actual economic savings purported by the War Office's policy change. Mr. Joseph Mooney from Dublin City echoed the sentiment that Irish beef was recognised as among the best in the world, while imported cattle transported long distances could not compare in quality. He expressed hope for cooperation between Irish and English cattle breeders to oppose the detrimental policy.

The meeting unanimously passed a resolution protesting the alteration in the army meat tender, calling upon the Secretary of State for War to reconsider and reinstate the preference for native home-bred meat. It also urged that future tenders for agricultural produce, such as oats, hay, and straw for troop horses, prioritised Irish products and contractors. To represent the Council's position, a deputation comprising Mr. O'Neill, Sir Thomas Esmonde, Mr. Byrne, Mr. Ennis, and Mr. John Cullinan, M.P., was appointed to join forces with the Irish Cattle Traders and Stockowners' Association in lobbying the Secretary of State for War. The General Council also resolved to send copies of their protest to Mr. John

Redmond, M.P., seeking the active support of the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) in protecting Irish agricultural interests.

The decision to allow foreign meat in army supplies was widely condemned as an unjust and damaging policy that threatened the economic welfare of Irish farmers and the agricultural community. The Irish County Councils' General Council, along with allied agricultural organisations, was determined to campaign vigorously to reverse this change, and uphold the interests of Irish agriculture in the face of government decisions, which had been perceived by them as favouring foreign imports over native produce.[38]

At an August 1906 meeting of Fermanagh County Council, a resolution of the Irish County Councils' General Council protesting the change in the army meat tender form—under which contractors are permitted to supply foreign meat killed at the port of arrival instead of native home-bred meat—was approved.[39]

The annual meeting of the Irish County Councils' General Council was held in Dublin City during the month of October. Mr M. J. Nolan, vice-chairman of the Kerry County Council, moved that Sir Thomas Grattan Esmonde be re-elected chairman for the coming year. Mr Nolan praised the Council for its excellent work and expressed hope that it would continue to serve effectively until the achievement of Home Rule. His motion was unanimously adopted. Following this, Mr Nolan proposed a resolution addressing the Government. He emphasised that the vast majority of the Irish people expected, based on the King's Speech and comments from Cabinet members, that the Government would rule Ireland in line with Irish aspirations. He stressed that the people would accept nothing less than a full measure of Home Rule. The standing orders were suspended to allow for discussion on this important issue. Mr Nolan remarked on the significance of passing the resolution, especially in light

[38] *Drogheda Conservative 7/7/1906*

[39] *Anglo-Celt 4/8/1906*

of reports that a more comprehensive Home Rule measure was being prepared for the following year. He stressed the need to clearly convey the strong feelings of the Irish people on this matter to the Government.

Mr Kelly of the Clare County Council seconded the resolution but expressed concern that the Irish Parliamentary Party had engaged in too many conferences without sufficient progress. He feared some members of Parliament might not have fully represented the country's interests and called for an end to such conferences, urging vigilance over their representatives. Mr O'Neill responded by clarifying that the resolution was intended as a vote of confidence in the Irish Parliamentary Party, which he believed retained the trust of the Irish people both collectively and individually. He dissociated himself from the criticism of the Party expressed by Mr Kelly, suggesting that undermining their standing would have been unhelpful.

The General Council then agreed to strengthen the resolution by reaffirming their firm stance that the Irish people were inherently free and entitled to self-government. They asserted that only an Irish Parliament, convened in Ireland, held legitimate authority to make laws for the country, and that any attempts by any other bodies to govern Ireland were unlawful and unacceptable to the broader Irish population. The amended resolution was adopted unanimously, with orders to distribute copies to the various County Councils throughout Ireland, and to the Prime Minister.[40]

Also at the conference, Mr J. T. Dolan, M.A., of Louth, moved a resolution seconded by Mr H. Brennan of Sligo, which was carried unanimously. The resolution emphasised the urgent need to break up large grass farms into smaller holdings, settling new families of farmers and labourers on the land. It noted that this approach was widely supported across Ireland as essential for the country's prosperity and the retention of its population. The resolution pointed out that while the Land Purchase Act of 1903 provided for such land

[40] *Kerry Sentinel 20/10/1906*

redistribution to some extent, there remained many thousands of acres across Ireland in the hands of tenants or freeholders who let the land annually, but found it increasingly unprofitable. These landholders might be willing to sell parts or all of their holdings. The General Council therefore called on the Irish Party to push for legislation empowering the Estates Commissioners to initiate negotiations with willing tenants or freeholders to purchase their occupation interests. This would enable the creation of multiple new smaller holdings by utilising the mechanisms already established under the 1903 Land Purchase Act. Additionally, the General Council adopted resolutions supporting the payment of fees for teaching the Irish language in National Schools, and advocating for stronger support of the Gaelic League.[41]

The *'Freemans Journal'* reported in November 1908 that, at a meeting of the South Dublin Rural District Council, a communication was read from Mr A. Keogh Nolan of the Irish County Councils' General Council, relaying several resolutions passed at their annual meeting. Among these was a proposal advocating for the unification of all Irish railways under a single management structure, which would operate under the oversight of a body representing the people of Ireland. The communication suggested that, in the absence of any newly constituted representative body, the General Council of County Councils could serve in that role. The Council also expressed its very strong support for the establishment of an independent Irish insurance company, asserting that such an initiative would be highly desirable and should receive the backing of all public bodies across Ireland. The resolutions were formally adopted, and the Council passed an additional motion stating that, should an independent Irish insurance company be established on a sound financial footing, they would be in favour of placing their business with it.[42]

During that same period, at a meeting of the Balrothery Board of Guardians, the Council considered for adoption the

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[41] *Drogheda Independent 27/10/1906*

[42] *Freemans Journal 8/11/1906*

resolutions previously passed at the Irish County Councils' General Council meeting, concerning the management of Irish railways and support for Irish insurance companies. Speaking in support of the railway resolution, Mr Kettle remarked that the economic prosperity of the country had been significantly hindered by the excessive and uneven tariffs imposed by the various railway companies. He highlighted, as an example, that farmers in County Dublin found it cheaper to send hay and straw to the Curragh from France, rather than from Dublin itself—a clear indication of the unfair and inefficient system in place. He noted that this issue affected not only farmers but many other sectors across the country. Mr Kettle expressed hope that meaningful reform would follow, and called on the Government to give the matter urgent and serious consideration. The chairman concurred, stating that it was widely recognised that the existing railway system did not serve Ireland's best interests. In light of the discussion, the board formally adopted the first resolution, which stated that the current system of managing Irish railways was detrimental to the country's welfare. The remaining resolutions were marked as having been read.[43]

In early December, the topic of insurance appeared again, this time at the Omagh Urban District Council. A resolution was received from the Irish County Councils General Council expressing concern over the significant volume of insurance policies undertaken by public bodies across Ireland. It highlighted that, under the prevailing arrangements, the premiums paid for these insurances served only to increase the profits of British, Colonial, and foreign insurance companies. The General Council believed that establishing an independent Irish insurance company was not only desirable but necessary, and urged that such a company be supported by all Irish public bodies. In response, the Omagh Urban District Council, on the motion of Mr John Devlin and seconded by Mr C. O. Morris, resolved that, should such a company be established on a sound financial

[43] *Drogheda Independent 10/11/1906*

footing, they would be in favour of transferring their insurance business to it.[44]

In mid-December 1906, as reported by the '*Evening Herald*,' at a meeting of the Council of the Dublin region of the Irish Industrial Development Association, the report of a deputation to the Irish County Councils' General Council, which had presented the case for the desirability of standardising goods required for public institutions in Ireland, was adopted by the Council.[45]

[44] *Ulster Herald 8/12/1906*

[45] *Evening Herald 18/12/1906*

Several major meetings of the Irish County Councils' General Council would also be held in Dublin City Hall.

MINUTE-TAKERS, HISTORY-MAKERS, 1907-1910

The '*Donegal News*' reported in January 1907 that a committee established following a conference of delegates from Irish public bodies, held at the Mansion House during the previous December, convened again to advance plans for the creation of an independent Irish insurance company. Mr James Crozier, J.P., T.C., presided over the meeting, which was attended by several prominent figures, including Mr Joseph Mooney, J.P.; Mr D.J. Cogan, M.P.; Mr M.A. Ennis, J.P.; Mr P. Baggot, R.D.C.; Mr William Field, M.P.; Alderman Irwin, J.P.; Mr C.H. Peacocke, J.P.; Alderman Lyon, J.P.; and Mr A. Keogh Nolan, secretary to the General Council of County Councils. The committee read and acknowledged resolutions from a significant number of public bodies across the country expressing support for the proposal. In an effort to further develop such a scheme, a circular was approved for distribution to clerks and secretaries of Irish public bodies, seeking prompt responses to guide the committee's work. The circular had requested information on four key points:

- Whether the body would be willing to support an independent Irish insurance company, provided it was founded on a sound financial basis.
- The total amount of fire risk insurance taken out by the body in the previous year, along with the corresponding premiums paid.
- The cumulative amount of premiums paid for fire insurance since the enactment of the Local Government (Ireland) Act of 1898.
- The total compensation received by the body for fire-related damages since 1898.

The campaign for an Irish-run insurance provider continued to gain widespread backing, with supporters emphasising the economic and national importance of keeping premium

revenues within the country and reducing reliance on British, colonial, or foreign insurers.[46]

In February 1907, at a meeting of the Omagh Board of Guardians, the Irish County Councils' General Council submitted a resolution proposing significant reform to the management of Ireland's railways. The resolution, structured in four key points, expressed strong criticism of the current system and called for sweeping changes to bring Ireland's railways under unified and Irish-controlled governance. First, the General Council asserted that the existing management of the railways was harmful to Irish interests. Secondly, it opposed the idea of transferring control to the British Government, warning this would equally be to Ireland's detriment. Instead, it advocated for the unification of all Irish railways under a single management body, which would be subject to oversight by a representative Irish authority. If no such representative body existed, the General Council offered itself as a suitable candidate for this role. Lastly, the resolution urged that legal powers be granted to this Irish-controlled body to purchase the railway lines and to raise the necessary funds through borrowing—secured not only by the revenues of the railways themselves but also by a national guarantee. The Council argued that this dual security would ensure access to funding at reasonable interest rates.

During the discussion, some concerns were raised. One member criticised the plan, arguing it would effectively mortgage the country, by using local rates as financial backing. However, Mr. P. M'Loughlin rebutted this, stating the issue of mortgaging was irrelevant compared to the larger principle. He also insisted that placing Irish railways under English control would risk their use against Ireland's economic interests, potentially undermining local industry. In contrast, Irish-managed railways could serve national development goals. Mr. Mo O'Kane, J.P., seconded the resolution. In contrast, Mr. R.S. Clements proposed the resolution be marked as "read," sharing concerns drawn from his experience with the Clogher Valley Railway, where he

[46] *Donegal News 19/1/1907*

had paid up to a shilling in the pound under a local rate guarantee. The Chairman disagreed with shelving the proposal so casually. Mr. D. McNulty, J.P., supported the resolution enthusiastically, describing it as a sensible and forward-thinking initiative. He believed a centralised management structure would create significant savings and streamline operations. He was also highly critical of the current fragmented system, claiming that many railway directors functioned merely as "figure-heads," drawing inflated salaries while contributing little to the effective running of the railways. The discussion reflected both the growing momentum for Irish control over key infrastructure and the concerns among some members about the financial risks involved in such a major undertaking.[47]

At an April 1907 meeting of the General Council of Irish County Councils, a wide range of national issues was addressed in addition to the ongoing concern regarding the Treasury's withdrawal of land purchase subsidies. The Secretary, Mr. A. Keogh Nolan, reported significant progress in the campaign to establish an Independent Irish Insurance Company. To date, 153 Irish public bodies had pledged their support. The total value of property to be insured by these bodies was estimated at over £7 million, with annual premiums amounting to approximately £6,166. In light of this, it was agreed that a formal scheme would be drafted to move forward with the creation of the insurance company. The Council also resolved to send a deputation to the Local Government Board to address the issue of consumption (tuberculosis) in Ireland, aiming to press for improved prevention and treatment strategies. Further initiatives included the formation of a committee to develop a plan for the re-afforestation of Ireland, and another to investigate the matter of over-taxation in Ireland, with a view to securing restitution and a fairer distribution of fiscal burdens. A resolution put forward by Mr. J.C. McDonnell of Galway, expressing general approval of Mr. Bryce's University reform proposals was passed, though it noted that modifications would be necessary to meet the specific needs

[47] *Ulster Herald 9/2/1907*

of the Catholic community. The Council also urged that Queen's College Galway be placed on equal footing with the colleges in Belfast and Cork. On the motion of Mr. J.F. Dolan, the Council adopted a resolution encouraging public bodies in Ireland to adopt standardised specifications for goods and services, with the aim of stimulating Irish industry. The resolutions previously passed by the Wexford County Council regarding religious persecution in Prussia were formally adopted.

In a separate motion, Mr. Byrne, though himself a publican, called upon the Irish Parliamentary Party to work toward applying the Sunday Closing Act to St. Patrick's Day, a move aimed at promoting temperance. Mr. T. Finlay proposed, and Mr. Dowdall seconded, a series of resolutions advocating amendments to housing legislation, particularly in relation to Labourers Acts. These proposals supported the expansion of compulsory land acquisition powers to improve rural housing conditions. Lastly, the Council urged the National Board to recommend that the Chief Secretary and the Government adopt the system of fees proposed by the Gaelic League for the teaching of Irish, re-affirming the General Council's commitment to the preservation and promotion of Irish language and culture.[48]

In June 1907, a special meeting of the Irish County Councils' General Council was held at the City Hall in Dublin to consider two important committee reports. The first report addressed the financial losses sustained by local authorities under the Land Purchase Act of 1903, while the second focused on the prevention of tuberculosis in Ireland. Sir Thomas Esmonde, Chairman of the Council, presided over the meeting. Both reports were adopted by the General Council. Following the adoption, a resolution was passed in favour of sending a deputation to the Prime Minister to highlight the serious threat posed to local government in Ireland by the ongoing losses related to the land stock flotation. The deputation was tasked with urging the Prime Minister to clarify the Treasury's proposed remedy for this

[48] *Irish Independent 19/4/1907*

pressing issue. Another resolution was adopted, calling on all Irish Members of Parliament to take immediate and decisive action in response to the financial crisis, emphasising the urgent need to prevent what was described as a potential national disaster threatening the country.[49]

The annual meeting of the Irish County Councils' General Council was held that October, with Sir Thomas Grattan Esmonde, Bart., presiding. Mr. O'Gorman of Waterford moved that Mr. P. J. O'Neill, chairman of Dublin County Council, be elected chairman of the General Council, a motion seconded by Mr. Harman of Cavan. In response, Mr. Joseph Mooney of Dublin proposed the re-election of Sir Thomas Esmonde, suggesting that the motion to replace him was intended to signal disapproval of certain views he had expressed over the past year. This view was met with approval from several members, who applauded and voiced agreement. Mr. Mooney continued by criticising the council for its intolerance despite its claims of supporting liberal and democratic principles. He reminded the meeting that Sir Thomas Esmonde was the founder of the council and had served admirably as chairman. He questioned whether there was truly no place for Sir Thomas Esmonde in the national council, prompting voices from the floor insisting he was in his rightful place. Mr. W. J. Nolan of Kerry seconded the proposal to re-elect Sir Thomas Esmonde. Mr. Power of Waterford supported Esmonde on the grounds that it was important to unite Irishmen rather than cause division, adding that if Sir Thomas held views more advanced than others, he was entitled to do so. Mr. Sweetman warned that removing Sir Thomas Esmonde simply because of differing opinions would be unwise, though he acknowledged others had the right to decide. Mr. Dowdall of Mullingar clarified that no personal disrespect was intended, but argued that those in representative positions should reflect the views of the majority of the people, a statement met with approval and applause. Mr. Harrington, M.P., expressed support for Mr. O'Neill's election, emphasising the importance of the council maintaining close ties with the Nationalist parliamentary

[49] *Skibbereen Eagle 15/6/1907*

party to remain effective. Meanwhile, Mr. Moran from Monaghan questioned the absence of Ulster representatives, suggesting the council had become overly political, departing from its original non-political mission to serve the country's public affairs. He said he would vote to retain Sir Thomas Esmonde in order to prevent the council turning into a political movement. Mr. Sheehy of Skibbereen declared that he would not support anyone out of touch with the Nationalist party. Mr. Harman of Cavan strongly opposed anyone who would encourage the Nationalist party to abandon the House of Commons, calling such a person a traitor to the country, to the approval of many. When the vote was taken, Mr. O'Neill was elected chairman by a majority of 31 to 11. Following this, Mr. John Fitzgibbon of Castlercanor was elected vice-chairman on the motion of Mr. Doris, seconded by Mr. Flynn. A resolution supporting the establishment of sanatoria for the treatment of consumption was passed, and with other business concluded, the meeting was brought to a close.[50]

Reporting on the tense affair a few days later, the '*Leinster Express*' noted that at the Dublin meeting of the Irish County Councils' General Council, Sir Thomas Esmonde, M.P., who had chaired the council since its inception following the Local Government Act, was decisively not re-elected by a large majority. One speaker noted that the opposition to Sir Thomas was primarily intended to signal the council's disapproval of certain views he had expressed over the past year. Mr. Sheehy of Skibbereen added that, had Sir Thomas remained a loyal and committed member of the Irish Party, he would have received the council's unanimous support.[51]

At the subsequent meeting of Cork Corporation, City councillor Mr. Callanan T.C., on behalf of Alderman Ford T.C., submitted a notice of motion protesting the eviction of Sir Thomas Esmonde from the chairmanship of the Irish County Councils General Council. The motion called for Cork Corporation to terminate its membership of the General

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[50] *Belfast Newsletter 18/10/1907*

[51] *Leinster Express 26/10/1907*

Council at the earliest possible date, and for copies of the resolution to be sent to the Secretary of the General Council, the Chairman of the Irish Party, and Sir Thomas Esmonde himself. Alderman Kelleher remarked, "More splits; more splits they want." The Lord Mayor then intervened, stating, "We will have no discussion today."[52]

In late October, a deputation from the Irish County Councils' General Council, led by Mr. P. J. O'Neill, J.P., chairman of the Council, had met with the Chief Secretary for Ireland, the Right Honourable Augustine Birrell, K.C., M.P., to discuss the urgent problem of tuberculosis in Ireland and the Government's role in addressing it. Mr. O'Neill emphasised the heavy financial burden already borne by Irish ratepayers and outlined the pressing need for the establishment of sanatoria to treat the disease. He referenced findings from a Royal Commission which revealed that Ireland was overtaxed by some £3 million annually, and urged the Government to consider a capitation grant for tuberculosis treatment akin to the subsidies provided for the maintenance of lunatics. He further proposed that tuberculosis be included in the Notification of Infectious Diseases Acts to enable effective control of its spread.

In response, Mr. Birrell acknowledged the grave nature of the tuberculosis scourge and called on all public bodies and citizens to unite in the effort to combat the disease. He stressed that public awareness was still in its infancy, and that more education was necessary to galvanise effective action. The Chief Secretary outlined plans for sanatoria provision in Ireland, highlighting proposed bed allocations at Whiteabbey (Belfast), Belfast Corporation, Cork County, and Dublin County, with a total of over 360 beds to be made available. He suggested that disused workhouse sites, located in healthy and isolated settings, could serve as suitable locations for sanatoria, which would not only reduce building costs but also mitigate local opposition to new constructions. Mr. Birrell cautioned against assuming that Treasury support for these efforts would be permanent, noting that the ultimate

[52] *Freemans Journal 26/10/1907*

goal was to reduce tuberculosis to such a degree that the expense would diminish over time. He agreed with the deputation's call for statutory notification of tuberculosis cases, though he noted that the severe penalties attached to the notification of other infectious diseases would not be appropriate or acceptable at present. Rather, notification would serve as a vital tool to inform public health officials and affected households, enabling a campaign of education on proper care and prevention. Looking ahead, Mr. Birrell indicated that legislation to authorise the erection of sanatoria and to provide for tuberculosis notification would likely be introduced in the next session of Parliament. He expressed hope that this would mark the beginning of a sustained and effective campaign against the disease in Ireland. The deputation, which included representatives from several counties and medical professionals, concluded their meeting with a shared commitment to advancing the fight against tuberculosis through co-operation between local authorities and the Government.[53]

As noted in '*Ireland's Crusade against Tuberculosis*,' edited by the Countess Aberdeen, and containing several discussions and lectures from the Tuberculosis Exhibition of 1907, Mr. P.J. O'Neill, then chairman of Dublin County Council and chairman of the General Council of Irish County Councils, discussed the attitudes that local governing bodies ought to take towards the matter of treating tuberculosis. At the conclusion of the talk, Mrs Nugent Everard expressed her belief that she was articulating the views of all present when she extended sincere thanks to Mr O'Neill for delivering such an informative and engaging address. She noted that he spoke with authority in his capacity as Chairman of the General Council of County Councils in Ireland and added that they hoped he might positively influence those with whom he interacted. She observed that the information he shared had been both enlightening and thought-provoking. While many of the topics he addressed were open to debate, she acknowledged that convincing various County Councils to adopt certain proposals would likely require significant

[53] *Belfast Newsletter 29/10/1907*

effort. One notable issue he raised concerned meat inspection. He had wisely suggested that compensation could be considered for owners of animals with undetected tuberculosis, provided it was clear they were unaware of the disease prior to slaughter. Mrs Everard also recalled an incident at the outset of the foot and mouth outbreak, where infected cattle belonging to a board of guardians' member were involved. A decision was made to cull every animal in the affected field, and no further cases of the disease occurred in the district. She cited this as evidence that infectious diseases could be eradicated if addressed promptly. In conclusion, she took great pleasure in formally proposing a vote of thanks to Mr O'Neill for his valuable and insightful lecture.[54]

At the commencement of November 1907, the recently elected Chairman of the Irish County Councils' General Council delivered what was regarded as a compelling and insightful lecture. In his address, he offered a scathing critique of what he regarded as the elusive and often opaque institution known simply as "The Treasury," particularly regarding its dealings with Ireland. His vivid description was believed to have laid bare the frustrations and challenges faced by Irish local government in securing fair treatment and financial support. The '*Munster Express*' remarked that this lecture shed important light on the broader issues of governance and finance affecting Ireland, and promised to provoke much discussion among public officials and citizens alike.[55]

At a meeting of the Cork County Council, Mr. E. FitzGerald, a solicitor from Mallow, moved a resolution urging the reunion of the National representative societies to save the country from ruin caused by apathy, inactivity, and lack of effective organisation. Mr. FitzGerald also expressed regret at the treatment of Sir Thomas Esmonde by the General Council of Irish County Councils, describing it as narrow-minded and undeserved, and warned that such actions would

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[54] *'Ireland's Crusade against Tuberculosis' (1908). Maunsel Press.*

[55] *Munster Express 2/11/1907*

only deepen divisions within Ireland's National forces. He emphasised the pressing need for unity at the time, lamenting the manner in which Sir Thomas Esmonde was removed from the chair—believing it had been due to his independent opinions. Mr. FitzGerald cautioned that petty acts of deposition only served to foster rancour and ill-will, which would take years to overcome. He further stated that whatever the "Sinn Féiners" might be, they should be regarded as Irishmen whose sole aim was to benefit the country. He suggested that if their programme were more moderate and properly shaped, it could have become a great advantage, working alongside the National organisation. Mr. Higgins of Midleton seconded the motion. Mr. Sheehy of Skibbereen, representing the Council of the Irish County Councils' General Council, explained that he had voted for Mr. P. J. O'Neill over Sir Thomas Esmonde because O'Neill supported the Irish Party, whereas Sir Thomas, initially a trusted party whip, had since distanced himself. Mr. Daly of Charleville moved an amendment to nullify the section of the resolution regretting Sir Thomas Esmonde's deposition. However, in the discussion that followed, all speakers supported the call for unity. At the request of his supporters, Mr. FitzGerald withdrew the latter part of his resolution relating to Sir Thomas Esmonde's removal, and the first part calling for unity was unanimously adopted. Mr. Daly also withdrew his amendment.[56]

That month, the '*Derry People and Donegal News*' reported that a deputation from the Irish County Councils' General Council had interviewed Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, Prime Minister, Mr. H. H. Asquith, Chancellor of the Exchequer, as well as Mr. Augustine Birrell, Chief Secretary for Ireland, regarding the finances of the Land Act. The issue raised before the Prime Minister was of great importance to Ireland, as several County Councils had already suffered losses up to £5,000 in a single year. It was outlined that these losses must be recovered from local rates, and all Councils faced the risk of similar financial strain due to the withdrawal of grants from funds that served as security to the Treasury

[56] *Freemans Journal 7/11/1907*

against losses on land purchase transactions. It was emphasised that the losses did not stem from tenants failing to pay their instalments, but rather from the depreciation of English credit, and the Treasury's handling of the matter. At the conclusion of the meeting, Mr. J. E. Redmond, M.P., who introduced the deputation alongside Mr. T. P. O'Connor, M.P., expressed satisfaction with the Chancellor's statement. Mr. Redmond noted that a thorough inquiry by the most competent authorities had been initiated to determine the best and promptest solution to the issue. He added that when Parliament reconvened, the Government would be prepared to announce its plans.[57]

At an April 1908 session of the Irish County Councils' General Council, the Chairman opened proceedings by recalling the Council's previous discussions on a matter of national urgency: the financial losses that local authorities in Ireland could face due to the flotation of Land Stock under the Land Purchase Acts. It had been agreed that a deputation should meet the Prime Minister to present their concerns directly, particularly in light of the Treasury's withdrawal of grants that had served as security in these transactions. The Chairman lamented the passing of the former Prime Minister, praising him as a sincere friend of Ireland who had firmly believed that Home Government was the only viable solution to the country's long-standing difficulties. His loss, the Chairman stated, left Ireland the poorer. The deputation had approached both the former and current Prime Ministers—Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman and Mr. H. H. Asquith (then Chancellor of the Exchequer)—with Mr. John Redmond, M.P., leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, introducing the delegation. The Chairman expressed gratitude to Sir Ennis for his thorough and detailed presentation at the meeting. Mr. Asquith had assured the deputation that a departmental committee would be appointed to investigate the matter and propose remedies. While the Government's promise of a timely resolution had not been fully met, there was some relief in the assurance that no substantial withdrawals from the local taxation grants would occur in the current financial

[57] *Derry People and Donegal News 9/11/1907*

year. This was seen as a temporary alleviation of the broader crisis.

Upon the publication of the Departmental Committee's report, the Council convened its Executive Committee to assess its recommendations. Although they wished to avoid pre-empting any decisions by the Irish Parliamentary Party, Mr. Redmond later confirmed in Dublin that a new Committee would be formed to examine the implications of the report, and he expressed his desire to work in cooperation with the General Council. The Chairman warned that the proposals within the report, if adopted, could seriously impair the progress of land purchase in Ireland. He stressed that £40 million in transactions remained to be completed, and with only £21 million paid to landlords so far, the remaining £139 million still needed financing.

The Development Grant available for absorbing losses amounted to a mere £92,000 annually, insufficient in the face of rising risk. The report only accounted for losses over the next three years and made no provision for losses incurred beyond that, especially for the £27 million in Land Stock yet to be floated. He highlighted a dangerous anomaly: tenants who had not yet secured land purchases were not only deprived of its benefits but also bore the fiscal burdens resulting from agreements made by others. This inequity, he argued, must be exposed and challenged at every opportunity.

Through Sir Ennis, the General Council had already submitted a proposed solution to the Treasury, but the departmental committee appeared to have dismissed it. Nevertheless, the Chairman urged restraint and cooperation with the new parliamentary committee before issuing further proposals. He warned that if Parliament adopted the report without further debate or opposition, future protests from local bodies would likely be ignored. Ireland, he said, had a tendency to let key public issues drift until it was too late. Rather than complain after the fact, it was crucial to act while matters remained under consideration.

Mr. M. A. Ennis (Wexford) proposed two resolutions which were carried by the Council:

- Support for the Irish Party – Commending the stance taken by Mr. Redmond and expressing hope that Parliamentary representatives would oppose the "reactionary proposals" within the report. The Council authorised its Standing Committee to collaborate with the Irish Party's committee in addressing the issue.
- Condemnation of the Report – Declaring that the recommendations made in the Departmental Committee's report were incompatible with assurances given to the Council in November. These assurances had guaranteed protection for Irish ratepayers from losses arising from land purchase—except in cases of tenant default. The Council called for a prompt and transparent statement from His Majesty's Government, reaffirming that land purchase should not be restricted or hindered in any way.

The Chairman closed by reiterating the seriousness of the matter and the urgency of resisting proposals that would unfairly burden the Irish ratepayer and jeopardise the land purchase programme, which had been so vital to the transformation of rural Ireland.

The developments regarding land purchase in Ireland did not resolve the mounting difficulties; instead, they worsened them. A detailed report laid before the General Council the previous year outlined the serious financial burden imposed on Irish ratepayers if land transfers under the Purchase Acts continued under the terms then in place. The summary presented a staggering picture: a rate of 9¾d. in the £1 for 68½ years, resulting in annual payments exceeding £600,000 and a total cost of over £41 million—based on land stock values at the time, with any further devaluation only increasing the burden. Rather than alleviating concerns, the Departmental Committee's report deepened the confusion, projecting an 11d. rate in the £ and an annual loss of £722,000 purely due to the discounted flotation of stock, exclusive of banking and brokerage costs. This represented an increase of one-sixth over previous estimates. Mr. Hannay

criticised the inconsistency in financial data provided by the Government and Treasury, noting that new estimates continually replaced previous ones. When the 1903 Act was passed, £100 million was deemed sufficient for the land purchase scheme; this estimate later rose to £160 million. Of the £12 million allocated to offer sellers a 12% bonus, about two-thirds had been exhausted, despite only one-eighth of the total land purchase being completed. Although agreements had been signed totalling £38 million, only £68,000 annually from the Development Grant remained as a buffer for Irish ratepayers before the burden would fully fall upon them.

In July of the previous year, Mr. Birrell had estimated that each £1 million in land stock would cost £4,000 annually for 68½ years. However, the Departmental Committee's own figures later showed that the actual cost had risen to £5,687 per £1 million, due to the National Debt Commissioners accepting stock at depressed market prices—thus increasing the overall burden to £722,000 annually. The Committee had misleadingly cited a lower figure of £545,000, factoring in the Development Grant, while the correct net cost was £722,000. Mr. Hannay declared the Committee's report not only misleading but actively reactionary, effectively proposing to halt land purchase in Ireland.

A practical alternative had been proposed to the Prime Minister and Chancellor: the issuance of Consols instead of Land Stock. This would have enabled more effective use of the Sinking Fund and potentially reduced losses. However, the Treasury had rejected this idea without offering a viable alternative. While numerous witnesses and financial experts —including Mr. Vesey Knox, K.C.—had supported the issuance of Consols, the Treasury claimed such a move might devalue the security and set a precedent for municipal schemes in Britain. Yet Mr. Hannay had argued that unless Consols depreciated by 9%, their issue would still be more favourable to Ireland. He also noted the Government's readiness to issue £134 million in Consols for the South African War, questioning why peace and reconciliation in Ireland did not justify similar action.

Furthermore, it was suggested that land purchase in Ireland had not simply been a local gas or water utility scheme; it was the resolution of a historic injustice stemming from state-led land confiscations, especially those dating back to 1641. As such, it should have received the full backing of British credit. The Treasury's stance suggested that while Ireland had been treated as part of the UK during wartime expenses, it was considered separate when it came to investment for its own development. Despite promises, it was asserted that the Treasury had merely allowed the National Debt Commissioners to exchange their surplus cash —potentially £4 million annually—for Land Stock at prevailing market prices, perpetuating losses. No effort had been made to issue Consols or to save Ireland from the burden of discount-induced flotation losses. In Parliament, Mr. Birrell had attempted to reassure critics by defending Land Stock—whether mockingly dubbed "Shamrock Stock" or "bog stock"—as a strong investment backed by guarantees and yielding good interest. Yet the financial facts, some insisted, told a different story—one of mounting costs, lack of Treasury initiative, and a failure to treat the Irish land question with the national urgency and fairness it had deserved.

It had been testified before the Departmental Committee that the Sinking Fund could be invested to yield a higher return than the 2⅜% prescribed by the Treasury Minute of 20 February 1905, and he was closely examined by the Committee. They initially attempted to discredit his argument by asserting that since the money had historically been reinvested in advances to tenant purchasers at 2½%, there was no real benefit in his suggestion. However, by the end of his testimony, the Committee had to concede the validity of his point: investing £100 of Sinking Fund money in advances to purchasers removed the need for a corresponding sum elsewhere, effectively producing the same benefit as an investment yielding 5¼%, rather than just 2½%. Mr. Ennis argued that the Irish Sinking Fund could have been used to far greater advantage. Meanwhile, the National Debt Commissioners had invested their Imperial Sinking Fund into the purchase of Irish Land Stock at

certified prices, earning between 3⅜% and 3½% interest—substantially better than the Treasury's prescribed rate. Treasury experts themselves believed that when the issuance of Land Stock ceased, the stock would rise to par. Thus, not only would the Treasury secure an immediate yield from 3⅜% to 3½%, but they also stood to make a capital profit of 12–15% when that increase materialised. Mr. Ennis characterised the entire transaction as a "big favourable deal for the British Treasury against Ireland." He argued that the sale of Land Stock had become a goldmine for British financiers, and now the Treasury sought to seize the profits for itself.

He further stated that if the Departmental Committee's recommendations were implemented, land purchase in Ireland would effectively come to a halt. The report emphasised that under current conditions, landlords were receiving too much for their properties, since security prices meant they could never replace their prior income levels with equivalent investments. They had been asked whether landlords might accept concessions, but it was replied that they represented the General Council of Irish County Councils—not a landlords' body. Still, they gave their personal opinion that some landlords might accept a compromise, if they were paid more promptly. However, given that it would take ten years to pay the £40 million already agreed upon, any landlord would hesitate to offer concessions for payments deferred that long, given the uncertainty of the stock market in ten years' time.

The report claimed that the remaining £68,000 from the Development Grant would finance land purchases without burdening Irish ratepayers for the next three years, assuming the issuance of just £12 million more in Land Stock. But Mr. Birrell had predicted that the fund would be exhausted in eighteen months, given an anticipated issue of £20 million. This meant £26 million worth of agreements already signed would remain unfunded, leaving the Irish ratepayers to absorb the loss from stock flotation. The Committee made no suggestion for how to finance the remaining £127 million, demonstrating a lack of viable solutions. Mr. Ennis warned

that without an urgent remedy, County Councils would be forced to collect taxes that were impossible to raise, even resorting to seizing cattle from tenant purchasers, only to then cover the purchase annuity on their behalf. This situation was untenable. He argued forcefully against a policy of delay and urged immediate clarity on the future of land purchase. Mr. V.A. Meehan, M.P., supported the resolutions, and said the difficulties arose from the inadequacies of the 1903 Irish Land Act, particularly its considerably flawed financial structures. He hoped their current proceedings would give a renewed impetus to completing land purchase in Ireland.

Dr. O'Ryan (Tipperary) expressed his dissatisfaction with the report and criticised the use of the bonus system, which Irish MPs had opposed in 1903. He believed the report proposed further burdens on people already ill-equipped to bear them, and called out the supposed misrepresentations throughout the document. He contended that the British Treasury was effectively making Ireland pay for the South African War—a war the Irish people never supported. Mr. Cullinan, M.P., also supported the resolutions and stated that if land purchase were to continue at the desired pace, it would financially devastate Irish ratepayers. He argued that any future bonus must be explicitly applied to its original purpose—benefiting the taxpayer and acting as a bridge, as it had been explained during the passage of the 1903 Land Act.[58]

In June, as reported by the '*Leinster Leader*,' the Chairman of Kildare County Council, along with county councillor George Wolfe, were selected to represent the Council on the General Council of Irish County Councils.[59]

In September 1908, the United Irish League and the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) strongly contested the financial framework of the Irish Land Act 1903, particularly its implications for Irish ratepayers. At the heart of the controversy lay the issue of "losses on flotation"—the losses

[58] *Freemans Journal 25/4/1908*

[59] *Leinster Leader 13/6/1908*

incurred when Irish Land Stock was issued at below its face (or "par") value. Under the existing law, these losses were explicitly charged to the Irish taxpayer, rather than being absorbed by the British Exchequer. This became a major flashpoint in the politics of Irish land reform, leading to numerous debates, committee hearings, and demands for legislative amendment.

The National Debt Commissioners, responsible for managing public investment and debt repayments, were advancing funds to support tenant land purchases. These advances were being made at a prescribed interest rate of 2¾%, as set out in a Treasury minute dated 20 February 1905. Critics argued that this rate was well below what could be earned through ordinary investment of the Sinking Fund—a pool of money intended to pay down debt over time. If the Sinking Fund could be invested in ways yielding 4% to 5% returns, then the artificially low rate mandated by the Treasury resulted in a shortfall—a gap that had to be filled. Rather than the British Treasury bearing this loss, the Land Act 1903 legally mandated that the burden would fall on Irish local authorities —specifically through provisions in Sections 36, 38,40 of the Act. These sections were key to the controversy:

- Section 36: This section explicitly stated that any losses arising from the sale (or flotation) of Irish Land Stock below par would be charged against the Guarantee Fund, which was composed of grants and revenues derived from Irish sources—essentially making Irish ratepayers the backstop.
- Section 38: If an Ireland development grant is established by legislation this session, £20,000 of it each year will be paid to the Congested Districts Board, and £50,000 annually (until March 1907) will be added to the Irish Land Purchase Fund. The remainder of the grant, and eventually the entire grant, will go into the Guarantee Fund to cover any shortfalls in discounted stock issues, taking priority just after certain other designated grants.
- Section 40: This provided the mechanism by which local authorities (like County Councils) would be called upon to make up any deficit in the Guarantee Fund. If the Fund was

insufficient to meet the Treasury's needs, Irish local authorities were liable for the balance.

The implications, it suggested, were stark. As the Act stood, the British Treasury was not only entitled but legally bound to recover these losses from Ireland. The effect was that British investors and the Exchequer benefited, while Irish ratepayers bore the risk. Prominent figures such as Mr. Ennis argued that this arrangement was both financially unsound and morally unjust. He and others contended that Sinking Fund money, rather than being passively invested at low yields, could have been used to make additional advances to Irish tenant-purchasers, thereby achieving higher returns and avoiding unnecessary losses. The Treasury's own experts even admitted that Land Stock prices were likely to rise to par once new issues ceased, meaning the British Treasury stood to gain a profit of 12–15%—all while Irish ratepayers were liable for losses in the meantime.

These complaints came to a head in the Departmental Committee's report on land purchase finance, which recommended using the Development Grant—a separate fund—for a few years to cover the shortfall. But this was seen as a temporary patch, not a solution. In fact, critics argued that the committee could offer no credible plan for financing the remaining £127 million worth of signed land purchase agreements—making future progress impossible. The Irish Party, led by John Redmond, took up the matter in Parliament. In April 1907, they raised it formally, and by July, they had secured a pledge from Mr. Asquith, supported by Mr. Wyndham, that flotation losses would not fall on Irish ratepayers. A Treasury Committee was established, but its eventual recommendations were met with outrage from Irish representatives. A special Irish Party Committee investigated further and submitted a comprehensive report, calling for the British Treasury to absorb these losses. The National Directory of the United Irish League backed this demand, urging all branches to support the Party's stance.

In a circular signed by Mr. Joseph Devlin, MP, the United Irish League reiterated its position. They explained that until

the 1903 Act was amended, the British Treasury would remain both entitled and compelled to charge flotation losses to Ireland. The League rejected any suggestion that the Irish Party had failed to protect Irish interests, and insisted that the real division was not within nationalist ranks, but between Ireland and the British Exchequer. They demanded a full transfer of liability for these losses to the British Treasury and warned that unless this happened, land purchase in Ireland would grind to a halt, and local authorities would face an impossible task: collecting punitive levies from the very farmers they were meant to support. The political and financial stakes were immense. As the Irish Party argued, allowing the current system to persist was tantamount to inviting economic collapse and social unrest. If land reform was to proceed peacefully and equitably, the financial architecture of the 1903 Act needed urgent revision—above all, to remove the crushing burden from Irish ratepayers and place it where it rightly belonged: on the shoulders of the British Treasury.[60]

An editorial in the '*Drogheda Independen*t' reported that the 1908 annual general meeting of the Irish County Councils' General Council took place during December in Dublin City, bringing together representatives from across the country to deliberate on pressing matters affecting Irish life. Among the most consequential issues discussed was a resolution concerning railways and mineral rights—proposals with significant implications for the future of Irish industry. This resolution, which had originated with the Drogheda Development Association, was adopted on the motion of Mr. Ennis of Wexford. It called upon the Irish County Councils to seek:

- The right to be represented, either jointly or separately and with legal counsel, at all inquiries or Parliamentary proceedings relating to Irish railways.
- The extension of the Light Railways Act of 1896 to Ireland.

[60] *Irish Independent 19/9/1908*

- The transfer of mineral rights—currently reserved to the Irish Land Commission under the Land Act of 1903—to the County Councils.

Each of these measures pointed clearly in the direction of practical Home Rule, a concept that had long been advocated by nationalists not only as a political aspiration but as a concrete means of economic empowerment. It was evident to observers that the growing influence of wealthy English railway companies in Irish infrastructure posed a real and urgent national danger. These companies operated with little regard for Irish interests and served as a modern arm of economic domination. Those who supported the resolution believed that local authorities—embodied in the County Councils—ought to be entrusted with a greater role in shaping industrial policy. The ability to appear at railway inquiries was not merely a procedural concern; it was about ensuring that Irish voices were heard where decisions were made. In the eyes of this newspaper, such a provision would have equipped Irish communities with a defence against external commercial interests that too often dictated the pace and priorities of national development.

The extension of the Light Railways Act was similarly seen as a necessary step. While the Act had already benefited rural communities in England and Scotland, it had not been fully applied to Ireland—yet the need here was arguably greater. Nationalist opinion at the time held that enhanced rail connectivity was essential to bringing isolated Irish regions into economic life, fostering small industries, and easing the burden on agriculture. The proposal to transfer mineral rights to County Councils marked perhaps the most transformative element of the resolution. Under the Land Act of 1903, the Land Commission retained control of these valuable resources. While this may have been intended as a measure of stewardship, it resulted in the stagnation of many promising sites. Supporters of the Council's resolution believed that local control would lead to local development —communities would then have both the incentive and the means to harness their own natural wealth. This editorial shared that belief. It had long been the view of this

publication that the path to true national self-sufficiency lay in enabling Irish people to manage and benefit from their own resources. The mineral wealth of the country had lain dormant for too long, and its revival ought not to be subject to distant authorities or bureaucratic inaction. Some sceptics, often among the more conservative or unionist-leaning public bodies, had questioned the relevance or effectiveness of the County Councils' General Council. But it was difficult to deny that a body representing the principal administrative authorities of most Irish counties spoke with legitimacy on matters affecting the national economic future. That the resolution had received firm backing from the Wexford representatives and the broader General Council confirmed a widening consensus in favour of economic devolution.

In conclusion, while the proposals of the General Council did not immediately translate into legislative change, they represented a clear articulation of the needs and aspirations of industrial Ireland. These were not abstract policy debates —they were calls for the empowerment of local institutions, the protection of national resources, and the right of Irishmen to shape their own economic destiny. If Ireland was to move forward industrially and economically, such ideas—rooted in principle and practicality alike—deserved not only to be heard, but acted upon.[61]

At the meeting of Galway County Council held in January 1909, councillors expressed renewed worries over the ongoing imposition of extra police charges levied against the county. The Chairman announced that for the half-year ending last March, the county had been burdened with an £8,000 police charge, while a further £5,000 had been levied for the subsequent six-month period—bringing the total to £13,000 in just one year. Councillor Mr. J. Flynn reported that at the most recent session of the Irish County Councils' General Council, a committee had been appointed to appeal to Mr. Birrell, the Chief Secretary for Ireland, requesting the remission of these extraordinary costs. It was noted that under the previous Government, such charges had, in some

[61] *Drogheda Independent 12/12/1908*

cases, been struck out, recognising both the political sensitivity and economic hardship they imposed on local ratepayers. However, in a written response from the Chief Secretary's office, it was made clear that there would be no reconsideration in Galway's case. The letter stated plainly that as the county remained under proclamation, the extra charge would stand. As such, Mr. Birrell refused even to receive a deputation from the General Council, claiming it would be of "no use."[62]

Meanwhile, when a full meeting of Cork County Council was held at the end of the month, the Secretary asked whether the Council would appoint three members to represent it on the Irish County Councils' General Council. Mr. Fitzgerald responded in the negative, stating that the body had "got us into trouble before." Mr. O'Gorman remarked that the General Council was "the nucleus of an Irish Parliament." He further noted that while the Council had previously declined to appoint representatives, it had done so later after mature deliberation. Mr. J. O'Mahony expressed the view that representatives ought to be appointed. Mr. O'Callaghan added that the General Council had taken the initiative regarding the Irish language in the National University. Mr. O'Mahony reiterated his belief that it would be a mistake to deprive the Council of representation on such a body. Mr. O'Neill questioned the benefit of appointing delegates at all. Mr. O'Gorman then proposed that Mr. Fitzgerald and Mr. Daly be appointed. Mr. Daly, however, remarked that he had been a member before but had not attended a meeting. The Secretary pointed out that the Council was entitled to appoint three members, and that if no one was appointed, it would likely not subscribe to the fund associated with membership. Mr. Guiney asked about the cost, to which the Secretary replied that it was £5 1s. 11d. Mr. Gilhooly, MCC, MP, suggested letting the matter drop. Mr. Buckley proposed Mr. Fitzgerald, but after further brief discussion, no decision was reached, and the matter was allowed to lapse.[63]

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[62] *Roscommon Journal 30/1/1909*

[63] *Skibbereen Eagle 30/1/1909*

A special meeting of the General Council of Irish County Councils was held on a February afternoon in the Members' Room of the City Hall. Mr. O'Neill, J.P., presided. The Chairman stated that the Land Bill had been found to contain provisions of considerable importance to the ratepayers and purchasing tenants, and while it had not been possible to convene an earlier meeting, the Executive Committee had referred three matters for consideration: extra police charges, the delay in preparing a report by Mr. Ennis (due to pressure of business), and the general financial implications of the Bill. Mr. M. A. Ennis, J.P., read a detailed written report outlining his analysis of the financial provisions of Mr. Birrell's Land Bill, introduced in the previous session of Parliament. He aimed to compare the likely outcomes of the Bill with those under the Land Act of 1903 and examine the respective positions of ratepayers, tenant purchasers, and landlord vendors.

Under the proposed Bill, the annuities payable by purchasing tenants were increased, roughly equating to an additional 1½ years' purchase over previous terms, or approximately a 3% increase in annual payments. Unless tenants had secured a corresponding reduction in price from vendors, they were in a worse position than earlier purchasers. However, Ennis pointed out that, under the 1903 Act, tenants were also liable for an 18 shillings per £ extra tax, which, when annuities were taken into account (valuations averaging £140 vs. £100), added another 7% to their payments. Thus, the difference between paying higher annuities or the extra tax might have been marginal. Purchasers under the 1903 Act often faced delays of 10–12 years between agreement and the issuing of a vesting order, extending the period of payment to around 80 years. Under the new Bill, vesting could have been secured in 3–4 years, leading to quicker ownership and lower overall costs. Mr. Ennis warned that while tenants in Class 3 might have benefited from the new Bill, it would have been "grossly inequitable" to place them in a worse position than neighbouring tenants who had already purchased under previous terms.

Landlords who sold simultaneously divested themselves of the liability to pay rates, escaping losses from fluctuations in valuation that might otherwise have fallen on tenants. The current Bill could, in fact, have offered better terms to vendors of heavily mortgaged estates than the 1903 Act, especially due to the long delays in finalising sales under the older legislation. Ennis criticised the Treasury's financial handling under the 1903 Act, stating that delays in payments and vesting orders had forced landlords to demand inflated prices. This increased tenant burdens unnecessarily. He supported this claim by submitting detailed figures from a representative estate to the Treasury Committee.

The General Council of Irish County Councils acknowledged that the Bill, though containing positive features, also had serious flaws. Certain provisions, they believed, were considered unacceptable to any responsible representative body in Ireland. However, if amended—particularly concerning interest rates and the treatment of tenants across classes—it could be rendered acceptable. The meeting concluded with an understanding that further representations would be made to the Chief Secretary and the Treasury, advocating the necessary amendments to secure fair treatment for both tenants and ratepayers.[64]

In June 1909, the '*Belfast Newsletter*' reported that a special meeting of the Irish County Councils' General Council was held at the Mansion House, Dublin City centre, to consider the establishment of a Higher Education Committee in connection with the National University of Ireland. Mr. P. J. O'Neill, J.P., presided over the meeting. Mr. Thomas Corcoran, chairman of North Tipperary County Council, moved the principal resolution. He proposed that a Higher Education Committee be appointed by the General Council, comprising seven members selected either from the General Council itself or from affiliated county council bodies. The committee would also be empowered to co-opt up to four additional members, all of whom were well-versed in Irish

[64] *Freemans Journal 9/2/1909*

educational needs. The resolution further stated that the committee would be tasked with the following:

- Drafting model regulations and recommendations for county councils on the awarding of university scholarships, including guidance on tenure, value, number, and preparatory education for such scholarships.
- Advising on the creation of a permanent body to ensure high and consistent standards for these scholarships, and to supervise their effective expenditure.
- Considering and reporting on any proposals received from educational institutions or interested parties concerning the improvement of educational opportunities.

Additionally, the resolution called for a deputation from the General Council to meet with the Statutory Commission and the Senate of the National University. The deputation would request that Irish be made an essential subject in the university's academic programme and would also consult with these bodies on the arrangements for county scholarships. Mr. Corcoran described the issue as one of "urgent and vital importance" to Ireland's educational future. He expressed a desire to see real progress on the matter of county scholarships at the new university. He also noted that the passage of the resolution might represent a significant step toward resolving what had become a nationally important and controversial issue. The motion was seconded by Mr. Linnane (Clare) and supported by Mr. Kelly (Galway).[65]

In July 1909, the '*Irish Independent*' reported that the question of the Irish language came before the Senate of the National University of Ireland, at a meeting presided over by the Chancellor, Most Rev. Dr. Walsh. A resolution submitted by Dr. Douglas Hyde had appeared on the agenda. It proposed that the Senate should ordain that all candidates for university entrance, as well as those enrolling in non-specialised courses, be required to demonstrate suitable proficiency in the Irish language and in the history of Ireland.

[65] *Belfast Newsletter 3/6/1909*

However, the resolution was ruled out of order. It was explained that the Senate was expressly prohibited from making any regulations relating to examinations unless a report had first been received from the General Board of Studies. As the General Board of Studies could not be established until the dissolution of the Royal University, the Senate was not yet in a position to act on such matters. In response to a separate request from the General Council of Irish County Councils — which had urged the Senate to receive a deputation advocating for Irish to be made an essential subject in the University's programme — the Registrar was instructed to issue a formal reply.

The response stated that, according to the University Charter, no matters concerning curriculum or examinations could be considered until the General Board of Studies was constituted. Since the Board could not be formed until after the Royal University's dissolution — a process expected to conclude no earlier than the end of October that year — the Senate would be unable to engage with the deputation until then. The Registrar added that the Senate would be prepared to receive the deputation at its first meeting following the dissolution.[66]

The issue of the extra police tax was the subject of a practical resolution passed at the annual meeting of the Irish County Councils' General Council, held in December 1909. The Council called upon the Irish Parliamentary Party to raise the matter in Parliament at the earliest possible opportunity. It was agreed that this would be the most effective means of agitating against the imposition, given that the police authorities were making use of a statute allowing for grants-in-aid to public bodies to be reduced by the amount of the tax whenever payment was resisted. During the meeting, it emerged that in several cases in preceding years, such claims had been remitted. The Council subsequently demanded that these charges would not be levied in any circumstance where, as stated in a resolution to the effect that police were simply removed from places where they had nothing to do, to

[66] *Irish Independent 28/7/1909*

other parts of the country where the Government thought it right and proper to place them. Delegates emphasised that the strongest possible protests throughout the country would serve to strengthen the hands of the Irish Party when the grievance was brought forward for discussion in the House of Commons.[67]

As the '*Strabane Chronicle*' documented, at the same convening, Mr. Mooney presented a draft Labourers' Bill, originating from the Dublin County Council. He explained that the proposed legislation would empower the Rural District Councils to pay the rates on labourers' cottages and subsequently recover the amounts through a small addition to the tenants' weekly rents. Mr. Mooney moved a resolution in support of the Bill, which was seconded by Mr. Griffin. Mr. Gallagher, representing Donegal, expressed support for the principle behind the proposal, noting that, in his view, it would be more convenient for labourers to pay their rates in small weekly instalments rather than in larger, half-yearly payments as was currently required. After considerable discussion, it was agreed to defer a final decision until the next meeting. In the interim, the secretary was instructed to seek the views of the the various County Councils around Ireland on the prevailing method of collecting rates at that time, in order to inform further debate on the matter.[68]

At a meeting of Londonderry County Council held in January 1910 as reported by the '*Derry Journal*,' a resolution was read at the meeting from the Irish County Councils' General Council, stating that the support currently provided by the Government for tobacco cultivation in Ireland was wholly inadequate. The Council called for more generous assistance to be extended to the industry. The Chairman remarked that the County Council should be asked to adopt the resolution, as its implementation would offer valuable encouragement to an industry still in its infancy, but with potential for further development. It was subsequently agreed to recommend that the County Council adopt the resolution.

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[67] *Freemans Journal 11/12/1909*

[68] *Strabane Chronicle 18/12/1909*

A letter was also read from the General Council, enclosing a draft bill concerning the collection of rates on labourers' cottages. The Chairman described the issue as highly important and deserving of careful attention. Noting that the matter more directly concerned the Rural Councils, particularly in terms of the collection and raising of funds, he suggested that each of those bodies be invited to express their views. On the motion of Mr. Stevenson, seconded by Mr. McCollum, the Chairman's proposal was unanimously agreed to.[69]

As reported by the '*Roscommon Messenger*,' at a February 1910 meeting of the Strokestown Board, a communication was read in which the Irish County Councils' General Council drew attention to widespread doubts regarding the legality of recent extensive pension cancellations carried out by Pensions Committees across Ireland. These cancellations, which in some cases continued to occur, were reportedly based on certain census returns that allegedly showed errors in the age of pensioners, an age originally fixed by the Committee when the pension application was approved. The Council strongly maintained that the age qualification of 70 years or over—set at the time of application—was an unalterable statutory requirement. They emphasised that the decision of the Pensions Committee on this matter, not having been appealed against within the statutory period by either the Pensions Officer or the applicant, was "final and conclusive" under the law and could not be re-opened by the Committee, or any other authority. This position was supported by a Court of Appeal ruling in the Pawley case. The Council announced its intention to seek a High Court ruling on this important issue without delay. Meanwhile, they advised that Pensions Committees should reject any attempts by Pensions Officers to persuade them to reopen or reconsider cases of this nature.[70]

In May 1910, Roscommon County Council a letter was received from the Secretary of the General Council of Irish

[69] *Derry Journal 31/1/1910*

[70] *Roscommon Messenger 5/2/1910*

County Councils, requesting that the affiliation fee be increased to £10. Mr. Grogan expressed his doubt about the effectiveness of the body's work, and proposed that the affiliation fee remain at £6. Mr. Galvin, however, defended the organisation, stating that since its inception, it had carried out important work for Ireland, particularly in relation to Old Age Pensions. The matter was deferred to the quarterly meeting for further consideration.[71]

By August 1910, at a special meeting of the Irish County Councils General Council held at the Office of the Dublin County Council, the Chairman, Mr. P. J. O'Neill, who was also Chairman of the Dublin County Council, addressed the assembly. He stated that there was a matter of very considerable importance to be considered that day—the question of the Report of the Railways Commission. He said he did not intend to deal at length with the report itself, as it had been widely circulated in newspapers and had generated controversy over the previous weeks, so most were already familiar with its provisions. However, he believed the Council would be wise, having already expended a considerable portion of its funds in presenting Ireland's case before the Commission, to give serious consideration to the Majority Report. He acknowledged that every representative body across the country had recognised the difficulties placed on the commercial development and prosperity of Ireland due to the current management of the railways. Now that a scheme had been formulated and circulated, with recommendations made by the Commission after months, indeed years, of inquiry, and with certain proposals laid before Parliament, the Council would be neglecting its duty if it did not express its views on the matter.

Subsequently, Mr. Field moved the following resolution, to the effect that their meeting would approve of the Majority Report of the Viceregal Commission upon Irish Railways, and called upon the Government to take immediate measures to adopt and carry into effect the recommendations of the Commission appointed by themselves. He remarked that the

[71] *Roscommon Journal 14/5/1910*

case was so evident that no further comments were necessary. He believed everyone agreed that the current railway system was not conducive to the interests of the Irish people.

Mr. Gorman seconded the motion. Mr. O'Carroll expressed his great pleasure in supporting the resolution. He stated that National Ireland was deeply indebted to Mr. Field for his tireless work on the matter, describing how Mr. Field had devoted himself to the cause in season and out of season. Though initially scoffed at, later consideration had proved Mr. Field right—that without proper transit facilities and the development of Irish industries, no Irish industry could prosper against external competition. Mr. M'Carroll praised Mr. Field's efforts as a pioneer, including his founding of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction and various other movements, all deserving the thanks of National Ireland. He did not delve into the merits of the Commission's findings, as the Commission itself had dealt with them thoroughly, and he found Mr. Thomas Sexton's analysis of the evidence both strong and overwhelming—enough to support the Majority Report and to silence much opposition.

Mr. Ennis declared the resolution had his heartfelt support, as it did that of every member of the Council. He noted that the General Council of Irish County Councils had spent every spare penny the previous year to bring forward evidence before the Commission, recognising the vital importance of the Irish railways question. He then suggested to Mr. Field that the resolution be amended to include a call for the appointment of a deputation to wait on the Government. Mr. Field expressed no objection to this suggestion. Mr. O'Carroll remarked that Mr. Ennis had always been constructive. The resolution was carried unanimously. The Chairman said he assumed Mr. Field would be content to leave the appointment of the deputation to the Executive Committee. Mr. Nolan suggested that the Lord Mayor should convene a meeting of representatives of the County Councils in Dublin to discuss the report further. The Chairman responded that they already had a resolution addressing the

matter in the most effective way and questioned what further purpose a separate meeting and additional discussion would serve.[72]

In September 1910, an editorial featured in the '*Drogheda Independent*' opined that the Report of the Higher Education Committee of the Irish County Councils' General Council, which had been discussed and adopted at the special meeting of the General Council the previous week, was a document of the utmost importance. It dealt with a matter of supreme national interest — the future of the youth of Ireland — and therefore demanded the serious attention of every Irishman. After a struggle that had lasted since the writer's own youth, a University had finally been secured for Ireland, where Catholic children could be educated without any violation of their conscientious convictions. It was opined that this long-overdue act of justice, however, had its limitations, much like other concessions wrung from a foreign and unsympathetic Senate. The Irish Catholic claim for legality in higher education, it asserted, had only been partially granted. The '*Drogheda Independent*' editorially affirmed that endowment was essential for any University's success. Unfortunately, it was in this critical regard that the National University fell short — it lacked the potential endowment needed for complete success. While the British Treasury had been stingy with Irish educational matters, Irish generosity had to step in to supplement the shortfall and provide the necessary support that would ensure the University's future prosperity.

However, it was noted, with approval, that early in its existence the infant University had faced a serious threat, which was thankfully overcome by the Senate's concession to make proficiency in the Irish language compulsory for matriculation. This victory for Irish identity was largely secured through the vigorous cooperation of the Irish County Councils' General Council, a body that had given a notable service to the Irish Language Movement. The '*Drogheda Independent*' endorsed the General Council's freshest recommendation, suggesting that the Irish County Councils

[72] *Freemans Journal 26/8/1910*

should come forward and provide additional funds to supplement the relatively meagre State endowments for the National University. This was seen as a natural and necessary step from a body that had already contributed so significantly to the promotion of Irish language and culture.

It was highlighted that two key ideas were prominent in the Council's Report. First, that funds from the County Councils should be directed toward equipping young Irish people for success in agriculture and industry; and second, that talented children from poor backgrounds should have access to an education that allowed them to fully develop what was described as their God-given talents. The editorial team of the '*Drogheda Independent*' expressed complete sympathy with this dual aim.

That said, the '*Drogheda Independent*' editorially questioned whether the Irish educational system at the time was adequately structured to realise these goals. Were the primary and intermediate education stages sufficiently graded and interconnected to prepare students properly for the advanced scholarships envisaged in the Report? Serious doubts were expressed. Like many other facets of Irish life, education had long been neglected or mishandled. Despite agriculture being the country's chief industry, Irish schools, even in rural areas, had largely failed to prepare future farmers with anything beyond a superficial theoretical knowledge. The '*Drogheda Independent*' editorial argued that much of the misguided attitudes and false pride pervasive in Ireland — which demeaned honest labour in farming and industry and falsely elevated clerical and professional work — could be traced back to the type of education offered in Irish schools.

The '*Drogheda Independent*' held that if the new University could provide Irish youth with a more realistic and healthy outlook on life than that presented in front of many at that time, it would have earned the nation's gratitude. But it also acknowledged that achieving this would be a tedious and laborious process. Nevertheless, the effort was considered well worth the commitment of all who cared for Ireland's future welfare. It had to enlist the cooperation of all sectors

of Irish society. Education in Ireland was described as fluid and tentative. What was required was genius, sound judgment, and a clear vision of Ireland's immediate future to reshape and co-ordinate the various educational elements into a coherent whole — one capable of realising the country's full industrial and commercial potential. In so far as the Irish County Councils' General Council's scheme pointed the way forward, the '*Drogheda Independent*' welcomed it warmly, and commended its recommendations and advice to the kind consideration of fellow countrymen.[73]

As reported by the '*Northern Standard*,' in October 1910, the Chief Secretary received a deputation at Dublin Castle from the Irish County Councils' General Council, which urged the necessity of taking steps to have the recommendations of the majority report of the Irish Railway Commission carried into effect. In replying, Mr. Birrell said the report proposed nationalisation, and it was pointed out afterwards that the grant from the Exchequer should be not less than £250,000. He questioned whether the subsidy was something to be insisted upon, and if so, he did not think that, with all the other claims being made, he could make it work.[74]

The annual meeting of the General Council of Irish County Councils was held in December 1910, at the Dublin County Council Chamber, with Mr. J. O'Neill presiding. Present were representatives from various county councils. Mr. Keogh Nolan, the secretary, read the annual report, which stated that at the last ordinary meeting a deputation's interim report on the subject was submitted on 2nd June 1909. At the special meeting on 25th August, congratulations were extended to the deputation on the satisfactory outcome of their representations to the Senate. It was considered unnecessary to refer further to the matter, except to note that this positive result imposed on the General Council—and on the County Councils generally—a corresponding obligation to give prompt and effective support to the great national institution concerned. The report then turned to County

[73] *Drogheda Independent 3/9/1910*

[74] *Northern Standard 29/10/1910*

Scholarships in the National University. It stated that the Higher Education Committee had considered the application of county scholarships to the purposes of the University and expressed satisfaction that at the special meeting on 25th August the committee's proposals met with unanimous approval, with favourable comments from all sections of the press and the public. In accordance with the report's recommendations, the Executive Committee appointed sub-committees to confer with the governing bodies of the constituent colleges of Dublin, Cork, and Galway regarding accommodation and other related matters.

In their report to the Higher Education Committee, attention was drawn to the importance of securing scholarships for county students who required financial assistance to pursue university degrees. It was noted that until the defect in provision for scholarships and bursaries was remedied, many promising students suffered a grievous hardship, and that the National University would lose the benefit of a promising class of graduates. A deputation's representation on this matter was received by the Chief Secretary on 21st October, who acknowledged the gravity of the issue and promised early consideration. The deputation emphasised the urgency of making adequate provision, a matter followed up by an interview between Mr. Birrell and a representative. The committee hoped that a Treasury grant would be given to provide equality for pupils progressing from primary to secondary schools, enabling them to compete fairly for the county scholarships in the National University of Ireland. Unfortunately, the committee was unable to make a definitive statement at the annual meeting due to the disruption of public business caused by the recent election. The deputation appointed on 10th December 1909 waited upon the Local Government Board on 4th January the following year and was subsequently received by the Chief Secretary in March.

It was deemed unnecessary to detail the progress of negotiations, but it was stated that, with the cooperation of the Irish Parliamentary Party, the deputation secured from the Treasury a grant to enable a test case to decide the legality of

reopening pension cases on the ground of age to be carried to the House of Lords. The Chief Secretary, the Local Government Board, and the committee had also been engaged in other matters connected with the administration of the Act in Ireland, particularly regarding the financial estimates for income from small holdings and pension maintenance. Negotiations on these points were still proceeding. The committee expressed gratitude to the various pension committees and applicants who had been involved in these discussions.

Regarding the Royal Commission on Irish Railways, the committee congratulated the General Council of Irish County Councils on the fact that the recommendations of the majority report on the direction and control of Irish railways had been adopted by the majority of the Viceregal Commission. The committee had appointed a deputation in July to the Chief Secretary to press for the immediate carrying out of the nationalisation proposals in the report. However, they acknowledged that the Chief Secretary's reply was satisfactory.

It was noted that a joint trunk road scheme had been promoted by the County Surveyors' Association, alongside prominent road users. The idea was first discussed during the Irish Road Congress held in April, where the proceedings were submitted and examined in great detail. The report of this Congress was subsequently published in book form and was expected to be in the possession of all members of the County and District Councils. The representative committee soon discovered that the brief interval between the establishment of the Road Board for Ireland and the deadline for submitting applications made it impossible to gather accurate and comprehensive information regarding the funds available for the project.

It had been found almost impracticable to formulate a carefully planned and detailed trunk road scheme within the limited timeframe allotted. At one meeting, Lady Aberdeen was present alongside the chairman. The committee received letters from various County Councils across Ireland, many of

which expressed strong support for the scheme, and had pledged their assistance in its implementation. Even the Bishop of Cavan offered his support, particularly in the promotion of agricultural development. During the course of the meeting, the Secretary read out the report. Although there were some differences of opinion among attendees, a broad consensus emerged that the scheme ought to be pursued with great vigour and determination. The Road Board, in consultation with representatives from the General Council and numerous road authorities, had dedicated itself to improving Ireland's road network. In the preceding year, it allocated fifty percent of its total grants to Ireland. These funds were used to upgrade existing stations and establish new districts, all aimed at enhancing the country's infrastructure.

At the same time, considerable attention was given to public health matters. Thousands of cases had been managed by medical visitors, reflecting the scheme's wider ambition to reduce transportation costs, thereby stimulating agricultural and industrial growth throughout the country.

The Constitutional crisis also featured in the discussions, with several councillors voicing their concerns about the volatile political situation in Ireland. They feared that unresolved tensions might escalate into conflict and civil unrest. A delegate from County Antrim expressed hope that the Government would maintain its support for public health initiatives and education, especially measures aimed at ensuring that poorer children could progress from primary and intermediate schools to the National University. The meeting proceeded with the unanimous resolution endorsing the Government's approach to the Home Rule Bill. Despite prevailing political divisions, councillors acknowledged the importance of education and the need to provide sufficient support to disadvantaged students.

The assembly also sought to pass a vote of confidence in the Irish Party's handling of the Home Rule question, which had urged continued co-operation among County Councils across Ireland to advance the country's best interests. However, at

least one delegate regarded the proposal as having too strong an association with the United Irish League and, in his opinion, saw no real necessity for it. However, he stated that if the section referring to the Irish Party were removed, he would support it, and he was confident that it would then meet the unanimous approval of the Council. Mr. Dowdall of Westmeath expressed regret that Mr. O'Brien's name had been brought into the discussion.

He explained that the Council had worked alongside the United Irish Party and consulted them on certain measures because they believed the Party truly represented, and rightly so, the people of Ireland. Mr. Dowdall further stated that even if some individuals in certain parts of Ireland disagreed with the Irish Party's policies, and despite Mr. O'Brien's victory in Cork, it did not alter the fact that the Irish Party, under the leadership of Mr. Redmond, represented nearly the entire country. Therefore, he believed that although the resolution cast no reflection on Mr. O'Brien personally, the General Council should continue to act as they had previously done in matters of national importance, reaffirming their confidence in the Irish Parliamentary Party on a broad scale. He emphasised their faith in the Party's parliamentary leadership and in the wise and capable guidance of the Chairman, Mr. John E. Redmond, and Mr. Butler of Kilkenny. Mr. Butler himself did not think it wise to propose amendments, as there was nothing in the resolution likely to offend anyone or bind anyone to a particular party.

The Chairman, when putting forward the resolution, acknowledged some light-hearted interruptions and humour introduced into the debate, which demonstrated the unity among them as Irishmen. The Committee had naturally sought subscriptions, recognising the importance of their work. The Chairman pointed out that although the sum of £139 might not seem very large, he was confident their friends would subscribe generously once the balance was reached. When the amendment was put to a vote, it was decisively defeated by 17 votes to 4. The Chairman, while presenting the original resolution, expressed the opinion that

it would have been cowardice not to have placed it on the agenda, as they had always received full support from the Irish Parliamentary Party. The resolution was carried by a significant majority. Mr. P.J O'Neill JP MCC was again elected as the association's president, with Mr. John Fitzgibbon MP elected as vice-president.[75]

[75] *Freemans Journal 10/12/1910*

Augustine Birrell, KC, MP (Chief Secretary for Ireland) was typically the main point of contact between the General Council of Irish County Councils and Westminster.

CONCLUSION

The story of the General Council of Irish County Councils during its formative decade, from 1899 to 1910, is not one of grand pronouncements or spectacular upheaval. It is, instead, a record of persistent, and often painstaking, attempts to carve a space for collective action within a structure still dominated by both imperial oversight and institutional caution. In tracing the meetings, reports, and resolutions of this body, what emerges is a portrait of a nation trying to negotiate the limits of its authority while simultaneously laying the groundwork for a more participatory and accountable form of governance.

The Council's most enduring legacy may not rest in any single achievement or policy, but rather in its very determination to act—to meet, to deliberate, to engage. In an age where rhetoric often outstripped results, the General Council brought together elected local representatives who were intent on making a practical difference in how Irish society was administered. That they did so without direct statutory authority, without consistent funding, and without always enjoying public or press support only deepens the significance of their work.

What the General Council did possess, however, was a rare and growing sense of institutional purpose. Through its correspondence, committee work, and general assemblies, it created a framework in which disparate local voices could find common cause. This in itself was no small feat. The Ireland of the early twentieth century remained a country of intense local loyalties, political fragmentation, and religious division. Yet, the Council managed to function as a national forum—an achievement that anticipated, in many ways, the more unified public institutions that would eventually emerge in the wake of independence.

One of the most striking aspects of the Council's proceedings is the sheer breadth of subjects it addressed. These ranged from the technical—such as railway rates, public health, and road maintenance—to the socially sensitive, including the

treatment of habitual inebriates and the administration of poor relief. The Council was also willing to engage directly with questions of economic justice and development, particularly in the advocacy for Irish industries and technical education. Its appeals to the Treasury, its interactions with government departments, and its joint actions with trade unions and bishops alike demonstrate a political maturity that sought to navigate, rather than simply contest, existing structures.

Though the General Council operated within the confines of a colonial administration, it refused to be reduced to a token body. Its resolutions, however non-binding, carried moral and political weight. Local Government Board officials and civil servants could not so easily ignore a body that, by 1902, had representation from almost every county and borough in Ireland. Its emergence as an unofficial but increasingly assertive voice in national affairs coincided with a gradual shift in the political temperature of the island—a move from constitutional agitation towards local, service-based leadership.

This gradual transformation was especially evident in the Council's handling of recurring institutional frictions. Its relationship with the Local Government Board, while consistently tense, displayed a careful balance between confrontation and diplomacy. Disputes over the unilateral imposition of salary increases for county officials, or the authority to appoint deputy surveyors, were not merely procedural grievances. They reflected a deeper contest over the locus of power: whether local representatives, accountable to their communities, or distant bureaucrats, beholden to central government, should decide how resources were distributed.

The meeting records and reports also reveal a keen awareness of legal limitations and administrative constraints. Many debates acknowledged the complications of taking certain matters to court, and a cautious approach was often advised. Nevertheless, the Council was not content to acquiesce. When necessary, it employed strategic pressure—

public statements, alliances with MPs, and co-ordinated resolutions from multiple counties—to influence policy or delay several undesired reforms. These tactics were not revolutionary in any dramatic sense, but they were part of a growing culture of local activism grounded in legitimacy, patience, and a belief in public accountability.

Importantly, the General Council's work also illuminates how local governance intersected with broader social movements. The concerns raised by the Trades Union Congress around fair wages, or the involvement of religious leaders in technical education campaigns, indicate that the Council was not isolated from other currents of reform. Rather, it acted as a conduit through which different interests —economic, religious, political—could be mediated and, occasionally, reconciled. This mediating function made the General Council unique among Irish political bodies of the time. It was neither wholly Nationalist nor Unionist, neither clerical nor secular, neither urban nor rural. It was, in the best sense, representative.

This inclusive character did not mean the Council was free from internal divisions or ideological fault lines. The question of whether political issues—particularly Home Rule —should form part of the Council's remit was a persistent source of tension. Some viewed the Council as a platform for advancing national autonomy, while others, wary of polarisation, insisted on its non-political character. That the Council survived these debates without rupture is testimony to a shared commitment to function over faction. It also suggests that, for many participants, the experience of local governance was gradually becoming an end in itself, rather than merely a stepping stone to broader nationalist aspirations.

The Council's influence also extended beyond policy into the realm of administrative culture. It fostered habits of inter-county communication, standardised certain procedures, and championed the exchange of ideas and best practices. Through its general meetings and committees, councillors came to see themselves not only as local advocates but as

part of a wider national community of governance. This shift in self-perception helped cultivate a more professional and deliberative ethos among Irish local authorities—one that would have long-term implications for how local government evolved in the decades that followed.

Moreover, the Council's emphasis on concrete deliverables—affordable railways, effective asylums, local industry promotion—anchored politics in daily life. It showed that governance was not confined to Westminster speeches or symbolic declarations, but unfolded in council chambers, in committee rooms, and in detailed correspondence about milk tariffs, technical classes, and tramways. The idea that politics could be domestic, even bureaucratic, was part of its quiet revolution. In doing so, it taught a generation of local leaders how to navigate complexity, compromise, and institutional inertia.

By 1910, the Council had not yet achieved the statutory status it long sought, nor had it secured regular state funding. But what it had established was more subtle and arguably more valuable: a precedent. It had proven that the various local authorities, when organised and determined, could collaborate, speak collectively, and influence national debate. It had demonstrated that democratic governance in Ireland was not only possible, but effective—and that such governance could thrive even in the absence of perfect structures or unfettered power.

The early years of the General Council thus deserve to be remembered not only for their institutional significance, but for their broader symbolic value. They represent a moment when Ireland, before achieving political independence, began to take responsibility for its own affairs—not in sweeping strokes, but through deliberative, persistent, and at times frustrating effort. This was, perhaps, the first sustained experiment in self-government since the Act of Union, and while modest in scope, it helped forge the habits, networks, and convictions that would underpin the next phase of the Irish democratic journey.

In revisiting this history, we are reminded that the making of democracy is rarely dramatic. More often, it is built in minutes and motions, in committee votes and funding appeals, in the steady accumulation of shared expectations. The General Council of Irish County Councils may not have changed the course of Irish history overnight, but it helped shape the civic terrain upon which much of that history would unfold. That is its quiet triumph, and its lasting contribution.

DÁN - I GCEANN NA COMHAIRLE

Dán le Tadgh O'Cúill-Maonlaí

I seomraí tóstacha ar Shráid Mhaoilsheachlainn,
shuigh fir na tíre, gan glór ná gaisce,
le peann ina lámh, is tuairimí soiléir,
chuaigh siad i mbun, gan arm, gan claíomh géar.

Ó Chiarraí go Dún, thug siad leo a guth,
ar son bóithre, ar son rún, le macántacht chrua,
is cé go raibh easpa dlí orthu go fóill,
bhí an croí go láidir, is an sprid gan smól.

Bhí cáipéisí smudaithe, tuairiscí as riocht,
níor chuir sé stop orthu, níor lig siad don mhí-ádh teacht,
chaith siad solas ar scéalta faoi chois,
ar thalamh gan fóirdheontas, gan moladh, gan fhois.

D'fhiosraigh siad rátaí, d'fhiafraigh siad cén fáth
a raibh na traenacha mall, agus an táille rómhór gach lá.
Ní rabhadar ag gearán gan treoir ná feidhm,
ach ag lorg cothroime sa saol, agus tuiscint shéimh.

Ní réabhlóid a bhí ann, ach suaitheantas ciúin,
i gcumhacht na smaointe a d'fhan seasmhach is buan.
Mar bhallaí nach dtit, cé nach bhfuil siad le feiceáil,
bhí a gcuid oibre go socair, ach ní ba lú ná gléineach.

Bhí daoine ag gáire, ag rá "Ní fiú é seo,"
ach d'éist an tír leis an bhfocal i ngach ceo,
ó Bheanntraí go Béal Feirste, tháinig an rún:
nach beag an comhairle nuair is é an cúram an dlúth.

Bhí an tAcht faoi chúram, an Bord á dhearbhú,
ar phá na n-oifigeach, gan cead ó lucht an chúige,
ach sheasadar ann, le teachtaireacht ghlan,
nach mise an stát, ach is liom mo pharóiste, mo chlann.

Níor fhágadar clú ná cáil ina ndiaidh,
ach coiste ag plé, le meon is le spiorad dílis,

agus i ngach brollach a labhair le dlúthmheas,
bhí fuinneamh ag feitheamh—an saoirse i nglas.

Seo iad na gaiscí gan scéalta i mbéaloideas,
gan corn, gan amhrán, ach le rún is le croí uasal.
Níor ghá dóibh reacht ná taoisigh i gcóir,
ach misneach a sheas i mbéal na gaoithe go foirfe is cóir.

**English language summary on next page.*

ENGLISH LANGUAGE SUMMARY OF POEM: The poem celebrates the early members of the General Council of Irish County Councils, portraying them as steady, thoughtful individuals who took on public responsibility without fanfare or personal glory. Instead of making dramatic speeches or seeking power, they gathered quietly—pens in hand—to deal with the real, everyday challenges facing local communities. They came from all over Ireland to convene in Dublin, where they would discuss things pertaining to poor infrastructure, unfair railway costs, and workers' pay. Even though they had limited authority, unclear records, and obstacles from the government, they stuck to their principles and tried to make practical improvements where they could. While some dismissed their efforts as pointless, the poem argues otherwise. It shows that their steady, cooperative work—done without glory or public praise—helped lay the foundation for future Irish self-governance and the Home Rule campaign. They're remembered here not as heroes in the usual sense, but as (primarily) ordinary people who led with patience, purpose, and quiet bravery.

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